SEPTEMBER
20th
1923
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

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Hugh Pendexter
John Webb
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William Byron Mowery
T. S. Stribling
George E. Holt
Frederick Moore
H. S. Cooper
Walter Inland

2 Complete Novelettes

SEPTEMBER 20th ISSUE, 1923
VOL. XLII No. 5

ADVENTURE

★

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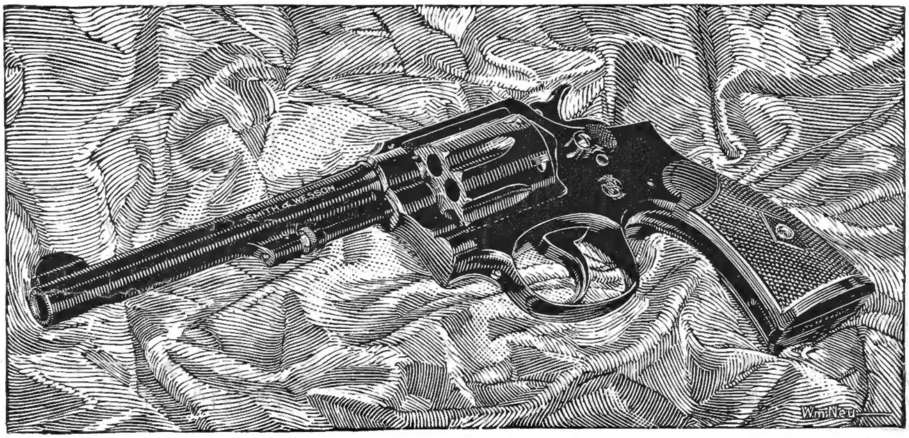

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10. *Parade of the Wooden Soldiers*
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12. *Lost, a Wonderful Girl*
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ADVENTURE
Sept. 20th, 1923

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 42
Number 5

LISTERINE
LISTERINE
LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY
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Many users of Listerine have never discovered the unusual properties as a perspiration deodorant, peculiar to this well-known antiseptic.

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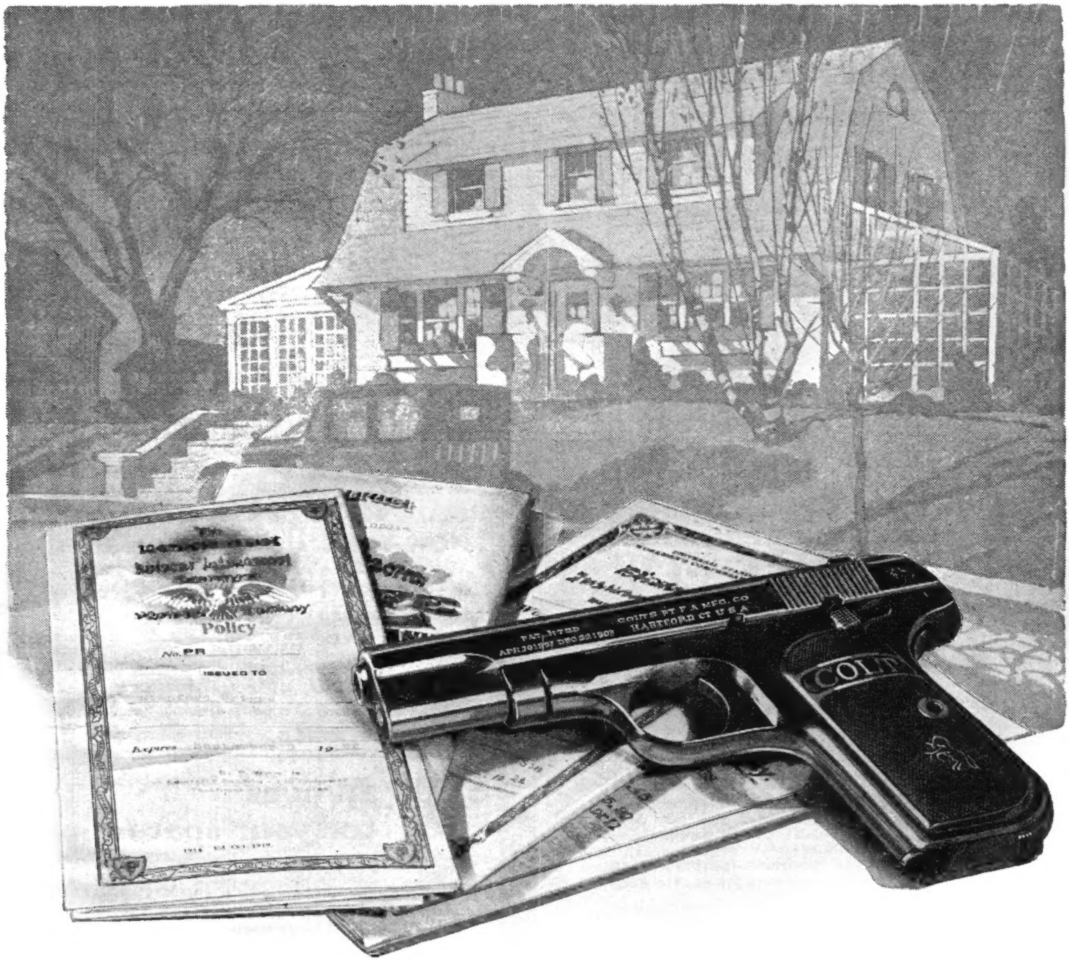

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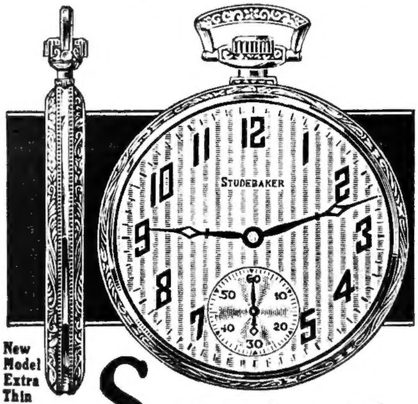

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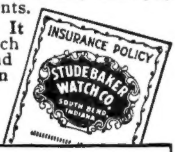

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Germs are here, there and everywhere. They are in the air, in your food and the very water you drink. In fact, scientists say your body is full of them. They are only waiting for your vitality to weaken and then they are going to get you.

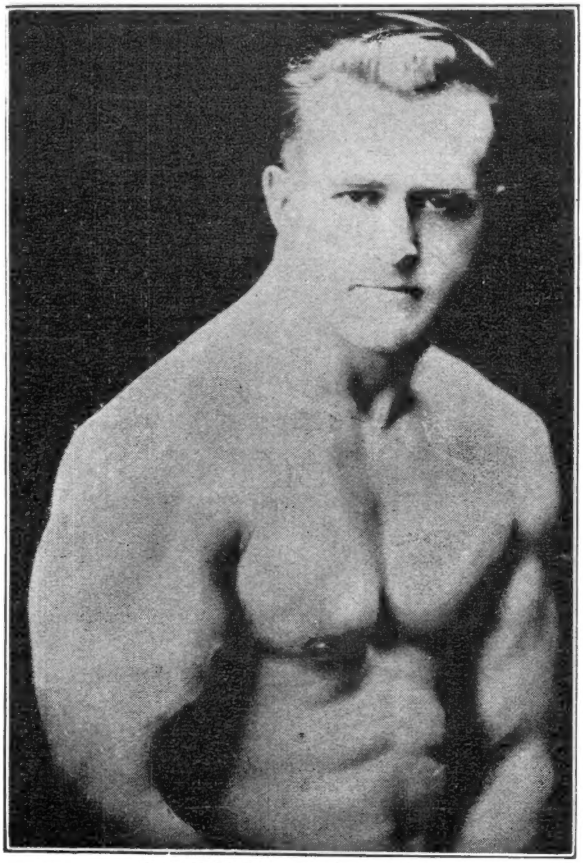
But what does a strong, healthy man care about all this? Once these terrible germs find your lungs breathing deep with oxygen and your heart pumping rich, red blood, they are going to run for their lives. A disease germ has as much chance in a healthy body as a fly has in a spider's web.

Food Was Meant to Eat

I don't ask you to give up all the good things in life. I make you fit to enjoy them. Everything was made with some purpose. Food was meant to eat and a healthy man has no regrets for satisfying his keen appetite. A man who takes the proper exercise craves food and must have it. Water was meant to bathe with—both inside and out. By drinking plenty of water you remove the waste matter within, just as washing your skin removes the waste matter without.

I Make Muscle

I am not a doctor — I don't claim to cure disease. That is a physician's job. But follow my advice and the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. I build strength and endurance. I make muscle. Follow my instructions and you will increase your arm one full inch in 30 days—yes, and put two inches on your chest in the same length of time. But that is only a starter. Meanwhile, I work on those inner muscles surrounding your heart and other vital organs which affect your entire physical being. You will soon feel the thrill of life pulsing through your veins. You will have pep in your old backbone. There will be a flash to your eye and a spring to your step. You will radiate vitality and have the strong robust body to put it over. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. Come on and make me prove it. That is what I like, because I know I can do it.



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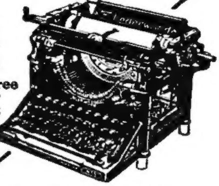

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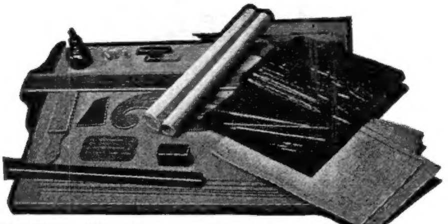

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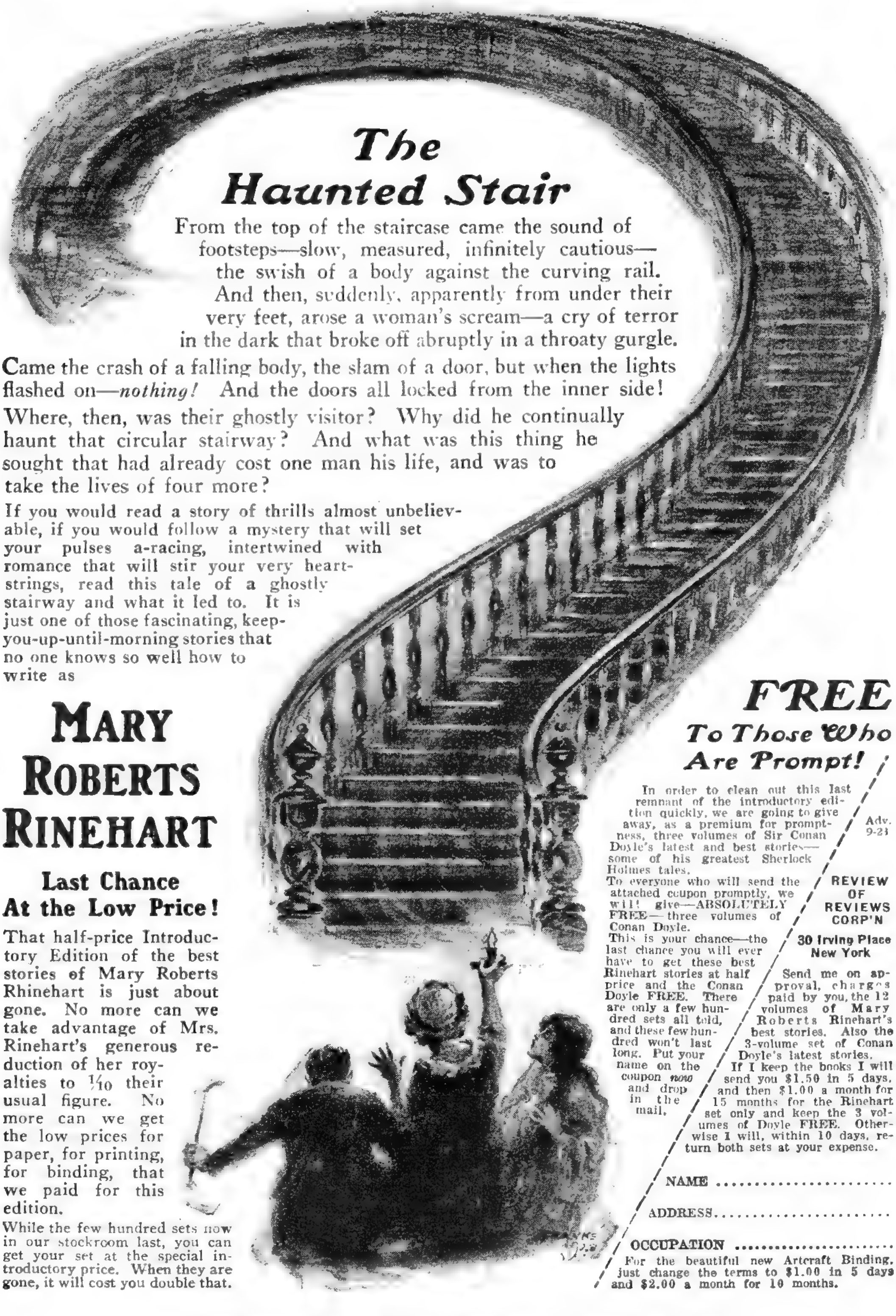

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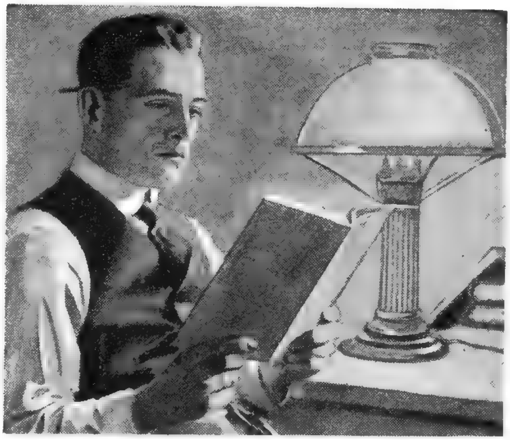

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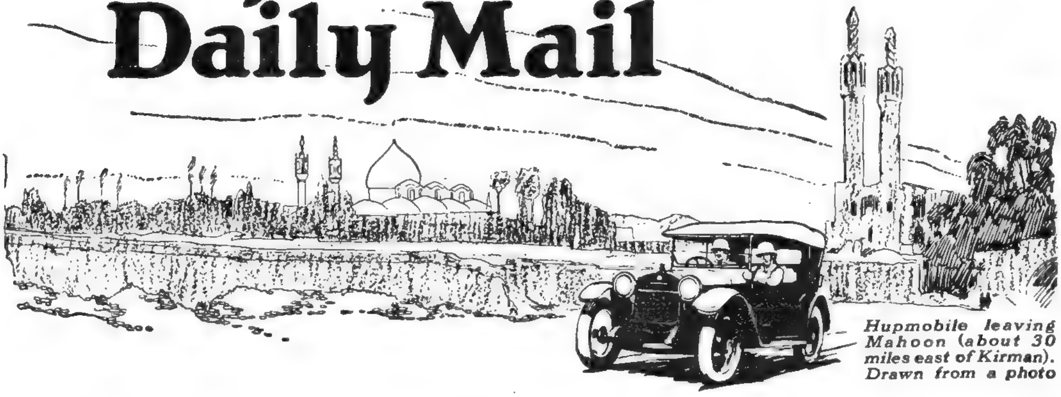

Hupmobile leaving Mahoon (about 30 miles east of Kirman). Drawn from a photo

The whole world is on tip-toe with interest in anything that concerns the Hupmobile.

This is again evidenced by the letter below. Last fall, we noted in an advertisement the trip of three Hupmobiles over perilous stretches in Persia.

Captain Merrill was a witness of the successful termination of that journey. When our announcement appeared, he was on service at Camp Meade.

The performance of these Hupmobiles far from home is only typical of Hupmobile performance everywhere on the face of the globe.

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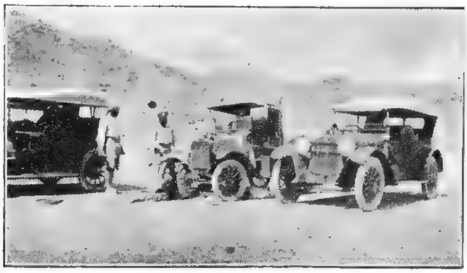
Camp Meade, Md.
September 7, 1922

I recently saw a full page advertisement in a magazine of the journey made by several Hupmobiles from Nushki to Kirman in Persia. As I was on the spot in Kirman when the machines arrived, it has occurred to me that you may be able to use the enclosed photographs. The following incidents may be useful to you.



Hupmobiles enroute, Kirman to Shiraz

Stop for lunch—about 100 miles south of Kirman

On the entire trip to Kirman, Sergeant Cox told me that even over the rough desert country he had only one puncture; also the cars went much farther than Kirman. After a few days' rest they went on to Shiraz; i. e., some of them—some 350 or more miles. One of the cars took me as far as the road went towards the Persian Gulf, about 225 miles below Kirman, over a bare desert, dry water courses, stones and sand.

JOHN N. MERRILL
Capt. 2nd Cavalry

Adventure

Registered in
U. S. Patent Office

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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DEEP in the Scottish mountains *Swain* finds his enemies, *Frakork* the witch and *Olvir Rosta* her grandson. There by the light of the burning skalli *Frakork* works strange magic while swords clash on spears. "SWAIN'S BURNING," a complete novelette by Arthur D. Howden Smith in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure
September 20, 1923
Vol. XLII No. 5

Black White

—A Complete Novelette

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Tiger River," "Cat o' Mountain," etc.

IF YOU will pardon a stranger for intruding upon your talk, *señores*, I can settle that argument of yours. I mean that I can tell you the whole truth about the matter. Perhaps you will not believe when you have heard that truth, but truth it is.

Gracia'—thank you—I will sit. Tobalito, bring a bottle of *ron anciado* of Maracaibo from the *cantina* at the corner, and a paper of *cigarrillos*—the Emperadores. No, gentlemen; allow me to do the buying. You Americans are not long in Venezuela, and you might be overcharged, while I—the *cantineros* of this Ciudad Bolívar know better than to try to cheat Loco León. The last one who tried it was three weeks in recovering.

Ha! You smile. Have you already heard of Loco León—Mad Lion? No? My name is Lucio León. But because I roam in wild places where these townsmen dare not go and see things which they do not believe, they have changed Lucio to Loco. I do not care. The laughter of fools is harmless.

Ah, *si*, I am a Spaniard. You at first thought me an American like yourselves, perhaps, because I am blond? It is a compliment. True, it is odd to find a yellow-haired and blue-eyed Spaniard on this Rio Orinoco, where almost every man is very dark of skin, hair, and eye. I am the only blond Venezolano on all the long Orinoco. Yet that is not so strange as the thing I now shall tell you.

And before I tell it, *señores*, let me say this: that tomorrow you may go to any one here in Bolívar—to the Banco de Venezuela, to the Royal Bank of Canada, to any house of business—and ask the presidents of them whether Lucio León, called León Loco or Loco León, who once each year brings down his balata rubber from the Alto Orinoco, is a liar. And they will answer that never, in the largest or smallest matter, has León been known to speak false. Then they may smile and add:

"Except when he speaks of things in the unknown mountains of Guayana and the jungles of Rio Negro."

You may judge for yourselves, *señores*, whether a man who never has lied to save himself or his money would tell false tales about matters that profit him nothing.

Now you were speaking of that tale which most men here have heard, but which is new to you strangers—that of *El Blanco Negro*, or Black White; the man of mystery who roams like a lost soul through the Guayana

---

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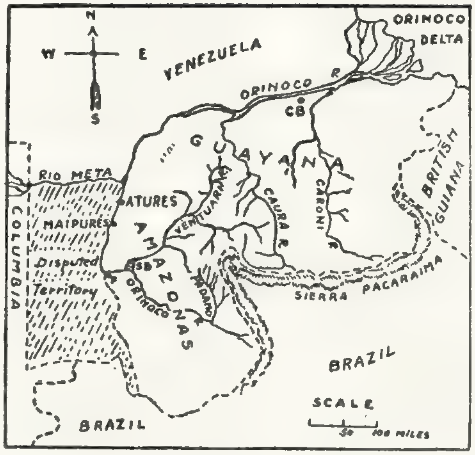
mountains south of here, and who never is seen by any man except the Indians who live there. You said, Mr. Davis, that it was "all bunk," which, I think, means you do not believe a word of it. And you, Mr. Seabury, said that——

Pardon? Oh, yes, I know your names: I know all about you. You came in on the last *Delta*, you are going up the Rio Caroní—a bad river, too, *señores*—to hunt gold and diamonds, but your guns are held in customs and you must wait here until Presidente Gomez telegraphs from Caracas to release them. How do I know? Ha! Everybody knows. When a North American comes in here every one learns everything about him. All the world watches and listens and tells.

But you were saying, Mr. Seabury, that the story of Black White was not only possible but probable; that you have heard that a man named White did come into Venezuela years ago, and went up the Orinoco, and disappeared; and that perhaps he liked the wild life so well, or found some Indian girl so attractive, that he "went native," as you call it. Now it happens that you have hit something near the truth, but yet not the truth. And I, who saw the beginning and the ending, will tell you all.

It was—let me see, what is the year? One forgets. Ah yes, nineteen twenty-two. It was, then, six years ago when I first saw White. I had brought down my balata from the Rio Padamo, and settled my last year's trade account at Blum's store here on the Calle Orinoco, and now, after traveling hundreds of leagues in boats, I wished to harden my legs again. So, while I was eating my *cena* here at this hotel, I decided that later I would walk up and down these steep Bolívar streets for the good of my muscles, as well as to see what I might see. I was just finishing my coffee and beginning to smoke another *cigarrillo*, when in came the man White.

I was sitting at that little table just there, *señores*, where I sat tonight and overheard your talk about him. At this table, where we now are, ate an Englishman whom I knew but did not speak to—a heavy man who drank too much and whose eyes were too close together; he was manager of an English trading-store which now is gone from Bolívar, and his name was Lord. I was thinking of matters up the river and looking out into this little *patio* beyond the rail, when the voice of the man Lord jarred on me like the sudden roar of an *areguato*—the big red howling monkey.



F—SAN FERNANDO DE ATABAPO
SB—RAUDA DE SANTA BARBARA
CB—CIUDAD BOLIVAR
- - - - - NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

"Well, it's about time!" he said. "What's the delay about? Got a new one to kiss in the corner?"

Then I saw White. He was swinging along past the tables, dressed in white from soft collar to rubber-soled shoes, carrying his white helmet in one hand, and laughing at Lord's bawl. My first thought was that he was the most handsome man I had ever seen. My second was that he was an Englishman like Lord—probably because he was coming to Lord's table and because of the helmet. Only new-come Englishmen or Americans wear helmets here. We Venezolanos use our sombreros of straw or felt.

But when White slid into his chair and mocked the Englishman I decided he was not English. He made too much fun of the English way of speaking.

"Wot say, old nut?" he drawled. "Why all the bally rumpus? Cahn't a chappy come a bit late to tea——"

Lord broke in with a snort.

"Bah! You —— Americans, with your stage-English twaddle!" he said.

White laughed loud and slapped the table. And he said:

"Got your goat again so soon? You ought to leave it in the store, you old rummy. And don't roar out such embarrassing questions at a virtuous young man. It isn't sportin', y'know. My word!"

This time it was Lord that laughed. He

leaned back and gurgled so that I thought he was choking. Then he got out:

"Virtuous! Haw-haw-haw! You virtuous? Hee-hee-hee—I'll tell Felicia that one tonight—haw-*haw!* But jokin' aside, White, you're headin' into trouble if you're not careful. Mercedes and Rosita are jealous, and a jealous woman down here is likely to be the ——, y'know. Two of 'em are two ——. And——"

"Oh, they can both go jump in the river, for all I care," White cut him off. "Now shut up and let me eat in peace."

Lord did shut up, except to chuckle now and then, and went on with his own eating. White sat just where you are now, Mr. Davis, facing toward me; and while he was waiting for his soup I studied him, while pretending not to notice him at all.

He was a striking man; tall, and strongly shaped, with curly dark hair, big blue eyes with long lashes, and splendid white teeth which gleamed now and then as if he were thinking of a joke. The dark hair and blue eyes seemed odd together, but yet they made him all the better looking. His jaw was well set and his lips full and good-humored, making him look much more manly than the eyes. But the most handsome thing about him, I think, was his skin.

It was as clear and clean a skin as that of a baby—a girl baby. Never have I seen anything like it on living man, or woman either—it was such a soft, glowing skin as one sees only in the colored pictures sometimes given away on calendars by Blum's store. It seemed too fine to be real. Somehow I felt that he must take very good care of it—almost too much care for a man to devote to himself. And as I glanced over his clothes this feeling grew.

His suit was almost too free from wrinkles, too perfect in fit. His bow tie seemed a little too exact, his shoes a trifle too snugly tied. I noticed, too, that he sat with legs forward and feet a little apart, so that he would neither cause his trousers to grow baggy nor soil his silk socks with shoe-sole or heel. And then, as I glanced at the helmet he had laid on an empty chair, I saw that it was very wide; it looked as if bought to give his skin all possible protection from sunburn.

My first admiration for him began to grow cool.

"He is a traveler for some large company in the United States," I thought. "Probably he has had to come around from Caracas on some business and will leave by the next steamer. A —— among the women, without doubt. Soon he will return to his country and tell his friends about his adventures in the 'wilds of the Orinoco,' all of which happened in the electric-lighted, police-guarded city of Bolívar. *Caramba!* What would he do if he ever really found himself in the wilds?"

A moment later I decided that one of my guesses was good but others were bad. The *señora,* who runs the hotel, brought him several letters.

"Some mail for you, Mr. White," she said. "The *Delta* came in today, you know."

"Good!" he cried, glancing at the envelopes. "Thank you, *señora.* I didn't expect anything just yet, but I'll bet this is what I've been waiting for. Now let's see."

There were three long white envelopes, and two small square ones which were light gray. He scowled in a puzzled way at the last two, then threw them on the table and ripped open one of the big white ones. I saw that the gray envelopes were covered with lines and writing, where old addresses had been changed to later ones.

Lord fixed his eyes on those letters and grinned, but said nothing. White read rapidly through all the others, which seemed to be letters of business.

"Aha! Now we're off!" he said, carefully folding them and slipping them into a pocket. "That's the dope I needed. Now I can sail for the Caura, where the bean does the tango and the balata balls its tar."

I nearly dropped my *cigarrillo.* This girl-skinned man going to the Caura? I knew the Caura, where both the tonca-bean and the balata grow, and I knew it was bad. It flows into the Orinoco, *señores,* from those same wild Guayana hills of which I have spoken—the land called by the Indians "Parima," which means "high falling waters," or cataracts. Its mouth is not far from here—about forty leagues—and its lower part, running through the open sabana country, is not very difficult; but the balata and the *serrapia*—tonca bean—grow only in the upper part, and there the river becomes wicked with *raudales*—or, as you call them, rapids. And the mosquitoes—I looked at White's wonderful skin and concluded that he must be joking, or else that he knew not what he did.

Lord said something which I do not remember, then pointed at the unopened mail.

"Those can wait," White said carelessly, and went to eating.

But soon, as if tired of seeing the gray envelopes there, he ripped them with a fork and opened up the folded sheets inside. After reading a few words he scowled again and flipped over the pages to look at the name signed.

"Oh!" he said, as if remembering. And then: "Ho, ho!" as if something was funny.

Turning back to the beginning, he read straight through the letter. Then he went through the second one. Long before he had finished he was scowling again as if annoyed.

"Oh, rats!" he snapped when he was through. "No chance!"

"She loves him no more," said Lord in a deep voice, trying to look solemn.

"No more? Huh! Too much! Here, look at 'em."

White tossed the letters over. Lord hesitated, then said, "Oh, all right," and began reading. Soon his mouth turned down.

"Hm. Yes. The old stuff," he said soon. "Those who dance must pay the fiddler."

White looked a little sober, but then he laughed in an impatient way.

"How can I help it now?" he complained. "Marrying won't do any good. If a fellow had to marry all the girls that—well, you know. Anyway, I'm thousands of miles away from there. I should worry!"

"Of course," Lord nodded. "Just as well for you, p'r'aps, that you're here now, y'know. You can lie doggo while it blows over. How is the—ah—law in your country about that sort o' thing?"

"Law? Humph! Nothing to worry about. She'd never take it to law. She's the proud sort—go away and hide somewhere instead of raising a row. I'm sort of sorry, but—it's all in a lifetime. Let's forget it."

And he resumed eating as if his appetite was all the better.

II

I DECIDED that I did not like White. I had long known that I did not like Lord. So I arose and went to my room, got my hat and walked out on the streets to see what amusement I could find.

I soon found some, for it was well known about town that I had brought down a good cargo of balata and had plenty of money; so it was not long before I was met by men who were very friendly and invited me to gamble. I did gamble, and spent a pleasant and profitable evening. When at last I tired of the game it was very late and the town very quiet. I said *buen' noche'* to my friends, who answered rather sourly—you see, I had kept all my own money and won from them six *morrocotas*, which in your money is one hundred twenty dollars of gold.

Then I went out into the bright moonlight and started for the hotel, walking in the middle of the street, as is wise when one has won in a gambling game and shadows are thick beside walls and under trees.

But the night was so cool and clear that I felt like walking on and on. And walk I did, leaving the Paseo and climbing up the Calle Libertad, and passing around by the *cuartel* to look at the soldiers sitting on guard all in a row, and so on down and around the hill. Then my legs said: "Enough!" So I swung back to Calle Libertad, still walking in the middle of the street.

The moon now was well over to the west, and half the street was very bright and half quite dark, except at the corners where the electric lights burned. The cobblestones began to hurt my feet. So, having seen no sign that I was being followed or waited for, I stepped to the smooth sidewalk on the shady side and swung on down it, walking on the curb, watching doorways, and making no sound with my well-worn *alpargatas*.

All at once I saw, in a doorway a little ahead, something move. I stopped short and loosened my poniard. The figure crouching there did not move again, but I saw its projecting head, watching. As I looked fixedly at it I saw also that it was watching, not me, but the house across the street. It came to me that the watcher did not know I was there.

Beside me was an empty doorway. In two steps I was within it. I know my way about this town, and I was quite sure that the house being watched was that of General—I will not speak the name here; but it is that of a man very high in power, who has—or had—the most beautiful daughter in Bolívar. Whether he himself was being awaited at this late hour by some assassin, or whether something else was afoot, I did not know. Neither did I care. But I was curious. So I waited.

I stood there hidden for perhaps half an hour. Nobody passed. Nothing happened. Then, slowly and silently, the door of the watched house moved open. A head came out, looked quickly up and down the street, the moonlight striking into its eyes. The door swung wider, and out stepped a tall man whom I instantly recognized. He was White.

He was not dressed in white now, but in a dark suit not so easily seen at night; and he wore no hat. Beyond him in the darkness, though, was something white; something like a robe or a frock. He turned, and for a minute he held this white figure very close. Then the door swung shut, and he started swiftly away down the walk.

Something flashed over the cobbles—a thing that flew like an arrow and glittered like a knife. It struck with a hard thud. White staggered, threw out his arms, and collapsed.

I came out. The lurking figure in the doorway down the hill also had sprung forth, and was starting toward the motionless man.

"*Alto ahí!*" I commanded, speaking low.

The other halted as if paralyzed. Even when I walked up to him he made no move to fight or run, but stood with face drawn and big brown eyes wide and glassy.

I recognized him—a young fellow of good family, hardly more than a boy, called Paquito; a lively young rogue, usually full of deviltry, but not at all bad. I was much astonished.

"Paquito? It is you?" I asked. "You have become a thrower of the knife? What means this thing?"

He swallowed, and his eyes became less large.

"Ah, Loco León!" he muttered. "I did not know you. It is—it is my sister."

"Oh!" I said. "I did not know you had a sister. Her name?"

"Mercedes. This *Norte Americano* has——"

"Say no more," I broke in. "But your sister does not live here, in the house of the general. Why have you come here?"

"I followed," he whispered, staring at the still figure on the sidewalk and beginning to tremble. "I could not—I could not quite do it when he went in—my hand shook. So I have waited."

I looked at him, and at the man he had struck down, and at the doorway through which White had just come—now shut and blank. I thought of what Lord had said, and of the words of White—that a girl named Mercedes could jump into the river for all he cared. And I thought also of the proud general and his beautiful daughter. And then White moved.

One of his arms began to twitch on the stones. He was not dead. I jumped to him, looked closely at him, and then pulled a keen-pointed knife from the left shoulder of his coat.

"Paquito," I said, rising, "you are a poor knife-thrower, and you may be glad of it. Your knife flew high and turned, so that the haft hit him over the ear. Then it fell, and the point caught in his coat without cutting him. You are very lucky, for it is not well to kill a foreigner on the streets of this town. Now follow this knife, and never throw it again at a man—until you can throw like this."

With that I swung my arm, and the poniard went *chuck!* into the middle of a telephone pole several *varas* away. Then I gave Paquito a shove. He fled to the pole, jerked the blade from it, and disappeared around the next corner.

I turned back to White just in time to find him rising with eyes full of rage. He swung a fierce blow at me. I dodged, and for a minute I was kept dodging, for he came after me with both fists flying. Then I became a little angry; I am not accustomed to being attacked without fighting back.

"Stop it, you fool!" I snapped. "Do you wish to wake the general with your noisy feet?"

It was the best thing I could have said. He stopped short, his eyes darting to the closed door.

"Now listen, *hombre,*" I went on. "I am not the man who knocked you down. I know who did, but I shall not tell you here. I go to the hotel, and I advise you to go there too, at once. From what I have seen, you should not linger here."

He stood glaring at me, and his eyes were not girlish now; there was something infernal in them. But he did not strike at me again.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his voice low but hard. "Somebody's spy?"

"No."

I began walking away toward the hotel.

He followed promptly, and closely. As soon as we turned the corner he spoke again. "Listen, you!" he ordered. "You've got some explaining to do, and you'd better do it quick. Right here and now!"

"Very well," I said. "Perhaps it is better. The hotel has ears."

And I told him just what I had seen and how I had happened to see it. But I mentioned no names—neither that of Paquito nor of Mercedes, nor that of the daughter of the general. The knife was thrown, I said, by a relative of a young woman who felt herself wronged.

"As for me," I ended, "I am Lucio León of the Alto Orinoco, and I have no interest in you. Ask anyone here tomorrow whether Lucio León, called Loco, is a spy. *Buen' noche'*."

"Bah! Every one of you —— Venezuelans is a spy!" he growled. "Now who's this woman you say is gunning for me?"

"If I were the spy you think, I might answer that question for a price," I told him. "But you get no name from me. And if you do not like us —— Venezuelans, the sooner you leave our country the better for you. Again I bid you good night."

He moved as if to stop me, but I looked him straight in the eye and he put no hand on me.

"Say, you talk straight," he admitted grudgingly. "And you don't look like a sneak, either. Well, I'm much obliged."

I walked away and left him there.

A little later, as I was undressing in my room, I heard him go quietly past my door. When I ate breakfast the next morning he was still sleeping, and I saw him only once in the following days—being late at meals seemed to be his habit, and I was in the hotel only at meal-times or late at night. When I did see him he looked just as on that first night, except for a lump over the left ear; and he gave no sign of ever having seen me before.

I heard, though, as one hears many things here in town, that he really was going to the Caura, in order to investigate and report on the extent of the *serrapia* and balata forests there; that he was doing this for some big company which might lease a concession from the government if the prospects were rich enough, and that he himself was not an employe of that company, but an official of it, and was thought to be wealthy. He had chartered a launch and picked a good crew, and so should have a safe journey, people said.

I knew well enough that if he was to make a thorough survey of the Caura country he could not do it in any launch—he would have to forsake the gas-boat and rely on canoes and paddlers and guides of the Indians. But I said nothing. It was not my business, and I was not his friend. I was only a "—— Venezuelan."

Then he was gone. I heard nothing of any trouble about women, or about any other thing. With his launch and his crew and his gun and maps and mosquito-nets and broad hat and beautiful skin, he was gone up the Orinoco.

My respect for him, which had been very small, increased a good deal when I learned that he had actually started for those wild lands. Whether I liked him or not, I had to admit that he was not afraid; and in a fearless man many other things can be overlooked. Yet I wondered whether he knew just how hard a task he had set for himself.

No word came back, except that brought by the master of a *piragua* bringing down rubber. He reported seeing a *lancha* rushing up the river, and was curious to know what party it carried. The next down-bound trader had no news of any gas-boat, so we knew it had turned into the Caura.

And that, *señores*, was the last time White or his crew, or even the launch that carried them, ever was seen on the Orinoco.

III

NOW, unless you gentlemen know how we make the balata rubber—and hardly any one does, except those who handle it—perhaps I should explain a little, so that you may understand more clearly what is to come. Everything about it is different from the work of collecting the more common rubber, which here is called *caucho* and in Brazil is named *seringa*. It comes from a different tree, grows in a different kind of country, is collected at a different time of year, is treated in a different way, and is used for a different purpose. Also, it sells for a different price, and that is why we collect it.

As you probably know, our Alto Orinoco is near Brazil, and the country there is much like Brazil—not open sabana, as here, but jungle; and there grows the *caucho*, along the river itself and in the bush round about.

We used to work the *caucho*, but for several reasons we do so no more. First, the price fell. Second, the Orinoco is a man-killing river in its upper part, full of huge boulders and dangerous *raudales* which have smashed many a boat and swallowed many a man; so it is not worth while to bring out rubber for small money. Third, very few people now are left alive there, because of the killings by the murderer Tomás Funes and his army of cutthroats, from 1913 to 1921.

You can travel for many a long league in the Rio Negro country—that is what we call the Orinoco in the Territorio de Amazonas, because the only town in that territory, San Fernando de Atabapo, is on an ink-black river—you can paddle for many a day, I say, and see on the banks only empty palm huts and overgrown clearings. Ask what they are, and you will be told, "Old *caucho* camps." Ask where the *caucheros* are now, and the answer is, "Killed by Funes." The few of us who are left alive in that country do not bother with the *caucho*. We go after the balata.

The *caucho* grows in flooded lowlands, and its milk is collected in the dry season. The balata grows in the mountains, and can be worked only in the time of heavy rains. The gum of the *caucho* is rolled on a stick and smoked over a fire. That of the balata is boiled down in huge pans. The *caucho* rubber is used for many things with which you are familiar. The balata is tougher, and from it is made belting for machines, insulation for wires, and such things, for which the *caucho* is not so good. No, *señor*, the balata is not sent largely to your United States—almost all of it is bought in England.

Now, because the balata grows in the mountains only, and the only balata-growing mountains we have are those of the Parima region, we who would work it must leave our dangerous Orinoco and journey up the still more dangerous rivers flowing out of these mountains; more dangerous, because they are even more rocky and have fierce currents. There are very few of us, as I have said, who do this work in the Alto Orinoco country; and of those few all but I, Loco, the Madman, live in San Fernando de Atabapo and send out Indian scouts to hunt for new districts each year. I do my own scouting, because——

Pardon? Why do we not tap the same trees each year? Because, *señor*, we do not "tap" the trees at all—we cut them down. So when we have worked a district once we have killed it. Wasteful, you say? Suicidal? Perhaps. But, *señor*, we live only while we may and we take all we can get while we live. What do we care for the years to come? We shall be dead then. And in this business it is every man for himself.

As I said, I do my own scouting, because Indians will not always tell you about all they find. What I myself have seen, that I know. I can not see clearly through another man's eyes. Furthermore, I will not live in San Fernando—I do not like it. Every foot of its ground is soaked with human blood. Its very air is poisonous. So when other balata men are spending the dry season there drinking up their money, I am out in the wilds cruising about for new finds. You gold-seekers would call it "prospecting," and so it is—only I prospect for trees instead of gold.

Now in this year of which I am telling you, I had worked out my district on the Padamo and decided not to hunt for another on that river. One reason for this decision was that the Guaharibos, the fierce savages who hold the country in which the Orinoco rises, had been growing troublesome in the neighborhood of the Padamo, and I knew that the next year they would be worse. I have a way of getting along well with most Indians—else I could not work balata, for all my men are Indians—but with those Guaharibos no man can get along. They are killers.

Besides this, I had tired of the Padamo country and had decided to prospect up the Rio Ventuari, which enters the Orinoco not many days above San Fernando: a river little known even to us men of Amazonas, and, I am very sure, known not at all to any one else, except the Indians who live there. That upland country is the homeland of the Maquiritares, with whom I have long been friendly. They had told me that on the Ventuari was balata. So now I headed for the Ventuari.

It was not until some time after White had left Bolívar that I began my long return up the river. As I come down only once a year, when I do come I make my stay here a holiday. I purposely remain until I am so tired of the town that I hate the sight and sound and smell of it; then it is a pleasure to leave it, and it is long before I crave to come back. That was what I did now. And when at length I sickened of town life I had my next year's supplies loaded into my *piragua*, spread her sails to the east wind, and left this place behind at the rate of twenty leagues a day.

I had almost forgotten about White. Nothing about him had come to my ears, or about any of the girls he knew. Young Paquito avoided me, perhaps fearing that I might tell something about him—though he need not have worried. By the way, I never saw him after that night when he threw the knife; he was drowned a few months later, being caught out here on the river by a *chubasco*—a fierce squall—which capsized his canoe in midstream. Some *caimân* got him, no doubt. He has never been found.

When I passed the Caura mouth, though, I thought of White long enough to ask if any of the crew had heard news or gossip about the *Americano*. None had. So I forgot him again. He who sails his *piragua* up the Orinoco when the floods are past and the water growing shallow, as it was then, has plenty of things to think about.

We had steady wind while going west, as usual, and after turning south we got strong gusts from the hills as far as the Raudal de San Borje, beyond the mouth of the Colombian river Meta. Then the breeze grew light and uncertain, as it always does there; and with the dying of the wind we were attacked in earnest by the swarming little mosquitoes which are the curse of the Orinoco above the first *raudales*, and which we call *la plaga*—the plague. From sunrise to sundown these little demons are torturing the skin and sucking the blood; and at nightfall out comes the larger black *zancudo de noche*, whose bite is poisonous.

Here we could travel only slowly. Yet, by taking advantage of every short burst of breeze or by putting out the anchor ahead and hauling on the rope, we worked safely through all the bad places to Atures. Through this *raudal* of Atures no boat can go, for it is *muy maluco*—very bad. As usual, I had my supplies carted around the *raudal* by the oxen kept there for the purpose; loaded it into another *piragua* above, and went on, my men poling along the banks, as there is no wind above Atures and the up-river *piraguas* have no masts. We got through the other bad places in the regular way—poling or hauling—to the Raudal de Maipures, where we had to use ox-carts again and board a third *piragua* at the upper end of the portage, as is customary.

I was now in the Rio Negro country, and as Funes had garrisons of his murder-army at both Atures and Maipures—places of about six houses each—I had to give all the Bolívar news to his gangs. In return I was assured that no order to kill me had yet gone out, although it was known I had money, and no man with money was safe in the territory of Funes. I have never known just why the man let me live so long, unless it was to allow me to make more money before my turn came, so that he would profit all the more by my death. He intended to have me murdered in time, for after he himself was shot my name was found on one of his lists of men to be executed. But in that year when I was going to the Ventuari no plan to end me was known.

So I went on, and reached San Fernando, and talked a while with Funes himself. He was in very good humor that day—he had shot two brothers with his own hand that morning—and all went well between us. The next day I transferred my supplies once more, changing from the *piragua* to the long *curial*—dugout canoe—which I always use above San Fernando. And three days later I was at the Raudal de Santa Barbara, which is also the mouth of the Ventuari.

Now this *raudal* of Santa Barbara is a great bay full of islands, and a very confusing place to get through. I knew the Orinoco part of it well enough, having passed through it time after time while journeying up or down. And now I had only to bear to the north until I had passed from the part which I knew into that which I did not know, and then keep working against the current, in order to reach the new river. Less than half a day of this brought me out of the maze of islands and into the *boca del Ventuari*.

The river surprized and delighted me. Rocks were there, of course, and we met small *raudales*, but had not much trouble in passing through them; and the river was wide and sunny, with cool breezes sweeping down from the mountains which we could not yet see, and a marvelous amount of fish and game in the greenish water or the tree-tangle along the banks.

Tapirs swam along unafraid; peccaries came down in file to drink; monkeys of every kind, from the great red *areguato* howler to the pretty little *mono tití*, ran along the branches and watched us. Big black-and-white ducks—the *pato real*—floated along within stone's throw; *pavas*, or wild peacocks, stood and stared at us; and by day and by night we heard along both banks the soft, mournful notes of the *paují*, or wild turkey, which is always moaning, "*Mi muert' est aquí.*"* At sundown the edges of the sandy *playas* were alive with *pabón* and other big fish, splashing about in the shallows as they fed.

With all this fine food waiting to be taken, we lost little time in hunting or fishing. The water, too, had fallen so far that my men could pole most of the time instead of paddling, thus traveling faster and becoming less tired. So, though the current still was strong, we made good headway each day.

We journeyed several days before we met men. Every day we saw signs of men—a pole tripod where a tapir had been roasted, a tiny *rancheria* among the trees where Indians had camped while fishing, a few charred butt-ends of sticks, and such things—but nothing of the men themselves. This did not surprize me, for I knew that the Indians of this river were very wary by nature and had become much more so since the Funes gang had been in control at San Fernando; the Indians soon learn of such things, and when they know we Venezuelans are killing one another along the Orinoco they move still farther away from it and its tributaries.

From the freshness of some of the signs we found, I suspected that the men who made them had departed only a little while before we arrived, and that if I should beat the bush for them, or go up some of the small *caños* opening into the main river, I should find them. But I suspected also that if I acted as if hunting them they would decide my intentions were evil and fill us all with arrows or poisoned darts—for some of those Ventuari Indians are fighters, and all of them use the blowgun and that *curare* poison which kills surely and swiftly. I wished to meet some Indians, but not in that way. I wanted to make friends of them and then to get rid of my present crew.

These men were of San Fernando. They were good rivermen, and for my Orinoco traveling they were the best men to be had: for the Indians who work the balata for me will not go down the big river—when the gum is collected they take their payments of beads, machetes, knives, and such things, and then go back by their own ways to their homes in the unknown uplands. Also, the Orinoco between San Fernando and Bolívar is to be traveled only by rivermen who know every bad spot and how to go through or around it, and these things the men of the mountains do not know.

Now that I was in the Ventuari, however, my San Fernando mestizos were useful to me only as polers or paddlers, for they knew even less about this river than I. Worse yet, I knew that as soon as they returned to their town they would drink and tell everybody all they knew about my movements up here in the hills. That did not suit me at all.

So I watched for Indians and saw none. Dawn after dawn we awoke at the first paling of the sky, aroused by the hoarse rattling call of the hump-backed, needle-beaked black *corocoro* birds, which came flying through the morning mists to begin their daily boring for slugs in the clay of the river-banks. Day after day we wormed from side to side of the winding stream, following the right depths for poling and avoiding both the shallows over sandbanks and the deep holes which meant paddle-work. Night after night we hung our hammocks from the trees or lay under the stars on some dry *playa*, undisturbed by either *tigre* or *caimán*—for the big hunting-cats are few along the Ventuari, and the only crocodile is the little *babicho*, which is harmless to all but small creatures. And the men who lived in the Ventuari country we neither saw nor heard.

Then, on a hot forenoon when we had shot no game because we had more than enough cooked meat left over, we approached a noisy *raudal*. Below it opened a heavily forested, steep-walled *caño*. And out from this opening in the bank suddenly shot another canoe.

IV

THREE well-grown young Indians were in the dugout, paddling lustily and laughing at some joke among themselves. We had been working quietly along beside the bank, expecting no such meeting, and the abrupt appearance of that boat startled us.

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*"My death is here."

They were more astounded than we. Their arms stopped in air as if paralyzed. My men stood like statues. The current took us both and carried us slowly downstream together.

"*Buen' dia'*," I said then.

The three watched us a couple of minutes, saying no word. Then, seeing that none of us made a threatening move, they slowly grew more loose of muscle. After another minute one answered—

"*Buen' dia'*."

The others looked as if they did not understand. But since one of them could speak Spanish it made no difference to me whether his mates could or not. I asked where they went.

"To shoot fish," the first told me.

Glancing back, I saw that we were nearing a *playa* which we had passed a few minutes before. So I drew out a paper of *cigarrillos* and suggested that we stop at the sand and smoke. They seemed doubtful, but when I lit a cigaret and they caught the smell of the tobacco they decided to accept. Keeping their distance, they grounded a little below us. But they would not land until I told them that if they would have their smokes they must come and get them. Then the one who spoke Spanish slowly got out and came forward. The other two stuck to their canoe, keeping their hands on their bows and fish-arrows.

I gave the brave one three cigarets, and a little box of matches, which are very precious to an Indian. Then I told my own men to take a bath at the other end of the *playa*. A fine breeze was blowing, so that the mosquitoes were not at all bad, and they jumped at the chance. As I expected, the Indians gained confidence in me when they saw my men leave their guns behind and go bathing at a distance. And when I walked unarmed to their canoe, they took their hands from their weapons and settled down to enjoy their smokes.

With one eye on my mestizos, I questioned them. The one who could talk to me did not know much Spanish, but I learned that they were Macos, lived at the head of the *caño* from which they had come, and were much afraid that we were men of Funes. I had heard something of the Macos; that they were a small tribe, living on a few *caños* of this river, who hardly ever came out to the Orinoco; that they were lazy and peaceable, and would much rather run than fight; but that they were one of the two poison-making tribes of Amazonas, the other being the Piaroas, who live in the rough country between the Ventuari and the Orinoco.

They were not very good men for my use, but if I could persuade them to work for me until I could come among the Maquiritares higher up the river, I should at least be free from my loose-mouthed mestizos.

So I told them who I was. My name meant nothing to them, though, and I knew that if they had not heard about me from the Maquiritares it would be worse than useless to say I was hunting for balata. That would only set them against me, for they would think I planned to come in with an armed gang and make slaves of them to work the gum, as has been done many a time along the upper Orinoco.

Saying nothing of rubber, therefore, I told them I went to visit my friends the Maquiritares, but that I did not trust my men, who might be spies of Funes. It would be much better for the Macos, for the Maquiritares, and for me, if these men were sent back here; but I must have men to take me on. Now if the Macos would go with me, I said, a danger would be removed from their country. Also, the Macos could trade some of their *curare* poison to the Maquiritares, who would be glad to get it. And I, on reaching the Maquiritares, would pay each Maco of my crew with a fine new machete, with its red paint still on the blade.

They watched me like cats. Then they talked it over and shook their heads. The one who could speak to me said they worked for no man. They did not need to take *curare* to the Maquiritares, for the Maquiritares would come to them for it. I said no more. I walked to my canoe, picked up my machete—a new one, little used—and brought it back. I stuck it in the sand, squatted, and smoked a new *cigarrillo*.

My mestizos were in no hurry to come back—they were having too good a bath. So there was plenty of time. The Macos could not take their eyes off that machete. Presently they talked more among themselves. Then I added that to each man who went with me and served me well I would give also five boxes of matches.

That was enough. They said they must go and talk with their *capitán*—chief—about it. They would meet me at this same time and place tomorrow. I told them to bring with them one more man, as I wanted four. Without reply, they pushed out and returned to their *caño*.

When they had disappeared I called my crew, told them I had decided to take a holiday, and pointed out what seemed to be a good little port just below the *raudal*, across the river from the creek of the Macos. It proved to be as good as it looked; and there we stayed, napping in our hammocks, smoking, and listening to the musical whistle of the *pajaro minero* birds, which were many and kept calling to one another across the stream.

The next morning the Macos returned, bringing with them the fourth man—an older, heavier, and stronger-looking fellow than any of the first three—and I saw at once that they were ready to go with me; for they carried big-game arrows as well as those for fish, a lance, a couple of blowguns, and a large basket full of the little bottle-shaped gourds in which the *curare* poison is carried by hunters.

After some more talk I bought their *curial* from them, paying in knives. This canoe I loaned to my surprized mestizos—who had not suspected what I meant to do—and, after giving them an order on a San Fernando trader for their pay, I sent them away in it. When they were gone the Macos looked relieved, and I felt more relieved than they looked.

Now that they had decided to go, my Indians proved willing enough. They were not good polers, but with the paddle they seemed tireless. We crawled on up the river for several days more, passing through small *raudales* at times, but finding none which gave us much trouble. Then we met one which stopped us dead.

It was more than a rapid—it was a fall, fifty feet or more in height. Its name is Quencua, or Tencua, and it is the real beginning of the bad country of the Parimas. From shore to shore runs a wall of rock, and over the wall plunges the river in roaring white. Below the fall is a long sluice of jagged rocks and raving water. The only way to pass this place is to go around it, over steep ground and through dense forest.

Now my Macos told me that from this place upward they never had traveled by water, and that only one of them—the fourth one—had ever been beyond here by land. The Maquiritares, they said, sometimes came down in canoes, but not often, as they found it easier and safer to walk for days through the open sabana country which lay behind the tree-grown shores.

From what the Maquiritares had told them, they knew that the river above Quencua was very bad. It was divided up by many islands, among which were channels full of jagged rocks, any one of which would split a dugout like an ax; and the currents were swift and treacherous, snatching any man wrecked among them and dashing him to death on the stony fangs awaiting him.

If one should pass safely up through this place, he then would meet the cataract of Oso, higher and worse than that of Quencua; for this is three falls, one above another. Beyond this was *raudal* after *raudal*, with the greatest and worst one in all the river higher up—that of Monoblanco. And beyond that—they did not know.

Since that time, *señores*, I have passed all the way up and down the Ventuari by canoe, in flood time and in the season of low water. By that I do not mean that I have gone over those falls; nothing goes over them and lives. But I have traveled the river between fall and fall, from source to end. And it is even worse than the Macos told me. He who rides on the waters of the Ventuari rides with Death.

So it was no place for me to attempt forcing a heavily loaded *curial* onward just then, especially with a crew which did not know the river and feared it. I was just deciding to have my men build a house in which I could store my supplies, and then to go on by land, when the Spanish-speaking one let drop some words about balata near by. Pretending not to be interested, I laughed at him. No balata grew here, I said; this river was good for nothing but fish and game. In his mild manner he insisted that he spoke truth. And finally, when I bet him a long bright belt-knife that he could show me no balata worth looking at, he was eager to prove that he was no liar.

He won his knife. And in winning it he gave me the price of many knives. The place where the balata grew was on a little *caño* about three hours' paddling downstream, which we had passed without a word and with scarcely a look. It took us a full day's traveling from Quencua to reach the trees, which were among rocky hills well back from the river. But when I had spent another day in scouting around among them, I knew that this was the place I had been seeking.

Not only was the balata very rich, but near it was the little *caño*, which in the time of heavy rains would become deep enough to float out the crop with ease. The river then would carry my boats swiftly to the Orinoco, and from its mouth to San Fernando would be only a short trip. I could make a fine little *sitio*, too, at the mouth of the *caño*, and, though the mosquitoes were rather troublesome, this would be a far better place to live than in the jungles of the Padamo region. And when this tract was worked out I could undoubtedly find more gum in the rougher country above the falls.

But all this depended on one thing—men. I must have men to work my new-found balata; and I did not want those men to be San Fernando mestizos, who surely would be spies and also might knife me some night while I slept. As always, I wished to work with Indians, and now the problem was to find the Indians. The Macos, I felt sure, would not make good steady workmen, even if they would consent to work at all. The Maquiritares were far up the river. I wondered whether any others could be found nearer at hand.

Of these things, though, I said nothing. Back at the mouth of the *caño*, I told my men to clear away a little space in the forest which grew thickly there, and to put up a stout hut well thatched with *platani*. When they had done so I had all my supplies moved into it. Then I told them that since the river above was *muy maluco*, I had decided not to use the canoe for the rest of the trip, and that when we went on we should travel by land. But, I said, my supplies were much too heavy for them to carry overland on their backs. They very quickly agreed that this was so. My friends the Maquiritares, I told them, would come and get these things for me after I reached their country, but I did not like to leave the boxes and bags here so long. Were there any other Indians nearer to us than the Maquiritares?

There were. They were on the Rio Manapiare, a day farther down-stream—a river entering the Ventuari from the north. I remembered it well, for it was the largest stream I had seen coming into this one. They said it was made up of three rivers farther back in the sabana—the Manapiare itself, the Paré, and the Guaviarito. And who lived there? I asked. Good people or bad? Both, I was told.

On the Guaviarito were men of the Piaroas and of the Curachicanos, who were good people. On the Paré lived the Yabaranos, who were peaceable if let alone but fierce fighters if bothered; and the Guayciaros, who were always bad. These Guayciaros lived nearest to a range of hills beyond which was the Caura. Between them and the Ventuari were the Yabaranos.

Thinking this over, I saw that only two of these four tribes could be relied on, if any of them could; the Yabaranos and the Curachicanos. The Piaroas there would be few, for the Piaroa country is farther west, nearer to the Orinoco; and they are not reliable people. The Guayciaros, who were bad and lived near the Caura——

Suddenly the name "Caura" brought to me the memory of White. I wondered where he was, and what fortune he had met.

Then I forgot him again as I thought about the two tribes who might be useful to me. I asked whether they would help the Macos carry my supplies to the Maquiritares—knowing that if they would do such work they probably would also work my balata. But the Macos said, "No." None of them would do any work for any man—unless, perhaps, the Yabaranos happened to like me. In that case it was just possible that they might.

I decided to visit the Manapiare.

The Macos were slow in consenting to go there, for they did not like the idea of going into the country of people who were known to be fighters and who might be angry at our coming. But neither did they like the thought of burdening themselves with the heavy weights which I let them think they must carry otherwise. So I won them over. The next morning we started, riding light in my empty *curial* and leaving the boxes and bags in the hidden hut.

We traveled fast down to the mouth of the Manapiare, and at night we slept some distance up the new river. The water here was very shallow now, and we had to twist along among *playas*, with steep banks on either side. The day-flying mosquitoes were worse here than on the Ventuari, as the breezes went by over the trees; but nothing else troubled us. At dawn the next day we were up, and at sunrise we were off. And we paddled onward until nearly noon before anything happened.

Then, ahead of us, broke out rifle-shots.

V

THREE reports sounded, as fast as a man could work the action of a repeating gun. They came from some place near by, around a turn. After the last shot we heard a cry like that of a man badly hurt. Then came the *chunk-chunk-chunk* of hard-driven paddles thumping the gunwales of a *curial*.

My Macos sat frozen. For a moment, so did I. Gunfire up this wild river could mean only one thing—that a man from outside was here. And such fast shooting meant that he was in trouble.

Did I drive my Macos on to help the gunman? I did not. The chances were that he was some tool of Funes, who well deserved killing; and I was not rushing to aid any such man as that. Instead, I took one quick look around, saw what a bad place we were in—walled in by high banks—and, by words and signs, ordered my paddlers to turn and get out of there. They whirled that heavy *curial* around faster than I had ever before seen such work done, and a few seconds later they were driving like madmen for the Ventuari. Every one of us knew that the approaching canoe must be running from Indians, and that those Indians might be swarming along both the high shores. They would undoubtedly attack us on sight.

Around a bend we surged, and into a long straight stretch with few *playas*. The Macos stroked so fast that the paddle-beat was a steady drumming. I snatched my gun and bullet-bag from inside the little *carroza** and stood up, bracing my feet against the sides of the canoe and resting arms and gun on the cabin roof as I faced backward. The steersman made desperate signs to me not to shoot, as the bullets would pass within an inch or two of his head. I nodded and ordered him to keep working.

We were half-way down the straightaway when the other canoe plowed into sight. I saw that it had three naked brownish paddlers, no cabin, and, in the stern, a queer-looking head of bright red with white spots. That strange head swayed in time with the swift paddle-drive; then became still and looked back. Just before we reached the next turn more canoes came driving into view—several of them, crowding one another closely. From them rose a savage yell and a volley of arrows.

One of the paddlers in the fleeing boat slumped down. The red head drooped, hung steady—then out cracked more shots. The first Indian canoe swerved, slowed, and blocked the others. A couple of splashes told me men were falling overboard.

Why I stopped I do not know, unless it was because I hate to run from a fight. But stop I did. I made my paddlers hold the boat at the turn, and there I stood up straight, watching and waiting. The fighting canoe did not slow up at sight of me; the two remaining Indians in it saw my *carroza*, my straw sombrero, my blue shirt, and knew I was a traveling *blanco*. That strange red head, though, started to rise, staring at me with huge yellow eyes, and a gun swung toward me.

My Spanish-speaking man, seeing the inhuman-looking thing, gasped—

"*El diablo!*"

The others moved as if to jump overboard.

I sharply ordered them to remain where they were. At the same time one of the approaching paddlers hoarsely called back at the red thing—

"*Amigos!*"

The head sank back, and the arms beneath it began to swing in paddle-strokes.

Back at the turn, the dugouts of the savages were straightening out and again beginning to come on. Having more paddlers than the men they hunted, those pursuers certainly would run down their game in the end unless the first had many bullets. The fact that they came on in the teeth of gunfire showed that they were determined to get that red-headed man at any cost.

The red head came on fast. Now I saw that under it was a thin brown shirt, that the hands gripping the paddle were covered by watersoaked gloves, and that the paddle worked clumsily, splashing as if the man was not skilled in its use. The head was red because it was wrapped in bandanna handkerchiefs; the staring yellow eyes were amber goggles. Of the face I could see nothing at all—the bandannas covered it. But I knew this man was a foreigner. No

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*Curved cabin covered with palm.

Venezuelan would wear such things on head and hands.

The Indians looked to be Maquiritares; light-skinned, clean-limbed, intelligent-faced. One of them lay still, a long yellow shaft sticking from between his shoulder-blades.

"*Quién es?*" I called. "Who are you? Maquiritares?"

"*Sí!*" gasped the bowman. "*Y americano* — and an American. *Quién es uste'?*"

"Loco León."

"*Bueno! Tire!* Shoot!"

The pair were half-dead from fatigue, but on hearing my name their hard-drawn faces stretched a little in a smile.

That brave little smile went straight to my heart, for, as I have said, the Maquiritares are my friends. The American, I knew, must be White, though I could not imagine how he had come here. But the bullets I promptly began pumping at the following canoes were fired not so much for White as for those brown boys who were giving their lives to save him. I would have done the same thing if no white man had been in their boat.

So, though I knew I was killing forever all chance of making friends on this river, I fired fast but steadily, downing a man with every shot. Yells of rage and screams of death broke out as my heavy bullets knocked the pursuers back against their mates or over the side. Arrows chunked into the water around me. But the canoes slowed again.

As the Maquiritares labored past me and I paused to reload, White turned without a word and again opened fire. Now I saw that he was using a short rifle which looked small and light, but which made smashing reports, showing it had terrible power. Also, I saw that in firing six shots from that gun he hit only one man. Shooting backward from a heaving canoe is not easy; but unless I could handle a rifle better than he did I should have been dead years ago.

Then he was gone around the bend, and I was slamming more of my blunt slugs into the naked men behind. When my old repeater again was empty the canoes were stopped, and not an arrow was coming from them. The Indians were crouching behind their dead or lying prone in the bottoms of their dugouts for shelter. As soon as my last shot was out of the barrel I told my Macos to move the *curial* out of there. They moved it fast.

While they toiled along through the windings beyond the turn, where several sandbars made slow going of it, I watched backward with gun ready. We had about cleared the sandy section and reached deeper water before the Indians behind us came into sight again. Then they came in a silent, dogged way, much more slowly than before. Seeing that this was the time to stop them for good, I motioned for my steersman to lie down and poured a stream of bullets into those following canoemen.

They could not stand any more of such fire. They worked back in sudden panic and hid beyond the bend.

We did not see them again. But I had no intention of stopping anywhere on this river, even though the fight was over. I had seen that the men behind us were not easy quitters, and knew they probably would not go back to their up-river homes until they had traveled, by water or by land, all the way to the Ventuari and failed to find us anywhere along their stream. By steady paddling we could reach the Ventuari before sundown and make camp in some place a mile or two up, on the far side. And that was what I meant to do.

My four Macos soon overhauled the exhausted Maquiritares. In fact, the red-swathed White told his men to rest as we approached. When we came alongside those yellow glasses were staring hard at me. Then a muffled chuckle came from under the sweat-soaked handkerchiefs.

"Well, say! You're the blond chap I met in Bolívar!" said a hoarse voice. "Seems like a thousand years ago. What you doing away up here, *hombre?*"

"Still spying on you, *señor,*" I retorted.

Then I looked along his canoe, noting that it held only a battered leather case with some loose cartridges on top, a long canvas bag, and his big helmet. There was no sign of food. The canoe itself was an old thin-shelled dugout.

"Say, Mister Man, I wish you'd forget that remark of mine," he said, as if angry with himself. "You're a regular fellow. I was sore that night, but——"

"Let it be forgotten, then," I broke in. "Is this *curial* yours?"

"Nope. Grabbed it from those savages. Had to get out quick, and this was the only chance."

"Where is the rest of your party?"

"All dead."

"Then leave that canoe and come into mine." I reached and caught his gunwale.

But he sat still.

"Oh, I don't know. Might as well keep it, now that I've got it. I need it."

I wasted no more words on him. His Maquiritares were almost done, and the only way to get them and ourselves out of that river quickly was to put all men in one boat. I told the Indians to get aboard. Without a word or a look at him they staggered up, lifted their dead comrade into my *curial*, and crawled across the gunwales.

"Say, you!" he blazed. "What d'you think you're doing? Those men are mine!"

"Not now," I disagreed. "They are their own men, and their people are my friends. Again I ask you to ride in my boat."

He growled something. Then he laughed shortly.

"Oh, all right. I'd be a jackass to refuse now."

And he flung his bag, case, gun, hat, and paddle into my boat and stepped in himself. I shoved his boat away and ordered my men to push on. Then I faced back up-stream, on guard against any further attack, though I expected none.

"If you have hunger, there is food in the *carroza*," I told him. "Cassava from San Fernando, cheese from Caicara, roasted *danta* (tapir), and *papelón* for sweets. Rough fare, but——"

"Rough? Say, *hombre*, it sounds like Broadway!" he declared. "I ate my last meal last night, and it was rotten."

With that he crawled inside. The Maquiritares watched him hungrily, but I saw no food come out.

"Feed your men!" I growled.

He muttered something. In a minute or two he began to pass out cassava and meat-chunks to the Maquiritares, who grabbed the food like starved *tigres*.

It soured me a little, his failure to think of those exhausted men while he himself was eating. Selfish to the core, I thought him. Yet I had to remember that he had asked nothing from me; it had been the Maquiritares who called for my help. He had fought his own fight, hung to his captured canoe until I took his paddlers from him, said nothing of hunger until I invited him to eat. Yes, he was a man, though one who thought of himself first.

For half an hour or more I kept watch behind us. In that time he and his men finished eating, the Maquiritares gained new strength and took up the paddle-stroke of the Macos, and he smoked a cigaret from one of my packets in the cabin. With six paddles going and the current pushing us, we now were fairly rushing down the river and there was little chance of being overtaken. So I let myself down and squatted within the *carroza*. Then, as I saw what he was doing, I could not help laughing.

I had not expected him to stand and help me keep watch, for the *curial* was too narrow for more than one man to stand before the cabin, and I was using all the foot-room. But I thought to find him resting at full length on the palm-pole flooring, or inspecting his gun, or looking ahead. Instead, he was intensely interested in his face.

He had hung a little pocket mirror from one of the overhead poles, and, with his bandannas dangling alongside his cheeks and one gloved hand waving away the mosquitoes, he was soberly studying a sore on one cheekbone. It was red and as big as a *bolívar*—that is, as large as a quarter-dollar of your American money—and I recognized it at once as a bite of the *zancudo de noche*. The bite of this mosquito, as you *señores* will learn before you return from the Caroní, makes a very painful sore which later turns rotten, and which leaves a scar long after the flesh has healed. I myself was suffering from two of them at the time, so I knew how his felt.

"You can do nothing for that until it is ripe," I said. "It is about three days old, yes? Then in three days more it will rot, and you can squeeze out all the matter through the big hole that will form."

"Does it leave a scar?" he asked quickly.

"*Si*. Like these." And I showed him several on my hands.

"The ——" he muttered. "I may be marked for life!"

I stared, wondering what to make of him. He had no thought for the desperate fight he had gone through—only anxiety for his looks. I did not know whether to feel admiration for his coolness or contempt for his self-love.

"Is that why you wrap yourself in those hot handkerchiefs?" I asked.

"Sure," he nodded. "The helmet and net are cooler, but the net's an infernal nuisance—can't see so well through it. So

I use the handkerchiefs. Can't let myself get all bitten up by these —— bugs, of course."

"Of course not," I agreed, keeping my face straight. "But now tell me how you come to be on this river. I am much astonished at meeting you here."

He scowled. For a couple of minutes longer he looked into the little glass, his fingers moving lightly across the hard sore spot as if he could not leave it alone. Yet it seemed to me that the sore was not the only thing in his mind. He looked as if considering how he should answer my question.

Dropping his eyes then to the packet of my *cigarrillos* which lay open beside him, he picked it up, extended it to me, and, when I had taken one, helped himself. After a few puffs of smoke had driven the mosquitoes from us he spoke out.

VI

"IT'S just a hard-luck story," said White. "Things have been coming rather rough.

"We went up the Caura until we got smashed in a mess of rocks and white water—a *raudal*, as you fellows call 'em. Those Bolívar fellows insisted they could drive the launch through it, but they couldn't. She went back and wrecked herself, and two of the five men went under and stayed under. The rest of us got her off and drifted down with her into smooth water, and we managed to save most of the stuff aboard. We never found the two chaps that drowned. Maybe the crocs down below got 'em.

"Well, then we got canoes and Indians at a place higher up—there's quite an Indian settlement there, and I stayed there a few days getting dope about the balata and bean country. Then we went along, with Indian guides, until we hit a fierce place where the river does a big tumble; it drops about two hundred feet, I should say, and they call it Salta Para. Know where that is? All right.

"We packed our stuff up around this big fall, and were to go in canoes those Indians keep above it. Got everything packed fine and slept on the bank that night, ready for an early break the next morning. But in the night it rained cats and dogs, and in the morning the river was away up.

"I thought we'd better wait awhile, and so did the Indians. But that know-it-all Bolívar bunch swore we could go on right away, and I let 'em try to prove it. They and the Indians got into the canoes and cast off, while I walked along shore a bit to see how they made out. I was afraid of that river just then, and I'm not ashamed to say so.

"They began making headway all right, and I was just about deciding I'd chance it, when I noticed they were getting farther out all the time. I yelled at them, but they didn't hear—the falls made a fearful noise down below. Then they woke up to the fact that a current had caught 'em, and they worked like mad, but it was no good. When they tried to head inshore that current got 'em right. The whole shooting-match went over Salta Para."

"*Caramba!*" I muttered. "There could have been nothing left of them."

"Not a thing. I went down as fast as I could leg it, but there wasn't even a hat.

"Well, I was up against it for awhile. Luckily for me, I hadn't put my gun or my personal kit aboard, so I still had them. Had my hammock and such stuff in my bag, and matches and cartridges and some other truck in that leather case; but there wasn't a bite of grub, or anything else.

"Seeing those chaps go over like that, fighting like mad and screeching like lost souls just as they went out of sight—it took all the nerve out of me. I just hung around that old camp a couple of days, moping like a sick owl. Shot some birds to live on, but had to eat 'em half-burned and without salt. Then, just as I was getting ready to start the long hike back down to the Indian quarters, some more Indians suddenly showed up. They came from up-stream.

"There were six of them, and a couple of them could talk Spanish—better Spanish than I can, which isn't saying much. They acted a bit wild at first, but after they looked me over awhile they decided I was all right, and we got along pretty well. They were from the upper Ventuari—away up, only four or five days' travel from the Caura—and were going down to visit their friends below Salta Para, where I'd been; it seems they visit back and forth by some short-cut of theirs. Well, after a lot of talk they let out that there was some fine balata country over west a bit, and by promising them a lot of presents I got them to take me over there—thought I'd look it over and then go on down-river with them."

"Where were you to get those presents for them?" I wondered.

"Oh, there are one or two little settlements out near the Orinoco where I could probably buy such stuff as they'd want, if they'd come out that far; and I still have a few Banco de Venezuela notes on me.

"So we went on up into the balata country—it's there, all right, and it's big. Well, then I kept poking along over the hills, keeping these boys with me, and we got into this country on the other side of the divide. I'd made up my mind that as long as I was in here I'd see all I could, though I don't mind telling you I'll never come back to Venezuela after I once get out of it. I'll report my findings to my company and then let some other poor fool develop what I've found. These cursed bugs of yours—well, it's not my kind of a country.

"Anyway, my Indians thought they'd gone far enough, and they wanted to get back to the Caura. But I told them that if they quit they'd get no presents, and if they stayed a little longer I'd give them more, and they stuck. Then we met up with those —— Yabaranos, and—here we are."

I thought a minute. So the men behind were the Yabaranos. And my Macos had said they were peaceable unless aroused.

"Did the Yabaranos attack you on sight?" I asked.

"Well, no. We stayed about three days at their place, getting rested and so on. But this morning they got sore about something or other and started to kill us off. Maybe some of my Indians did something they didn't like. Anyway, we had to rush a canoe and get out. They killed two of my men before we could get away, and two more on the way down the river. Maybe they'd have gotten the rest of us if you hadn't shown up. It was mighty decent of you, old chap, to pitch in and help. How on earth did you get here? You were in Bolívar when I left."

I told him I was roving around and looking for balata. Then I picked up my gun and got outside as if to watch behind us again. I wanted to do a little thinking without being talked to. And, leaning on the cabin roof as before, I thought.

I liked his off-hand way of telling his tale, and I admired his pluck in sticking to his work in spite of everything. Truly, one can not always judge a man by his face or his clothes. But the last part of his story—about the Yabaranos—did not ring true in my mind.

He had not looked me in the eye when he half-blamed the Maquiritares for the trouble. And I know the Maquiritares. Some trouble-makers can be found among them, as among any other people; all of them can fight wickedly if their wrath is aroused; but as a race they are good-humored, laughing much among themselves, and not at all the sort of people to stir up a fight. Besides, there had been only six of them, visiting a whole tribe of Yabaranos. For them to cause any trouble where they were so badly outnumbered would be the act of fools. And the Maquiritares are very far from being fools.

Thinking of all this, I decided that later on I would ask the Maquiritares for their side of the story. And that night I did so.

We thumped steadily on down the stream, and for a long time I stood where I was. White remained in the cabin—there was nothing else for him to do—and after awhile I looked in to find him asleep.

We reached the Ventuari even sooner than I expected, and at dark we were camping in a snug little port three miles up on the south side. Not once had I seen or heard anything more of the Yabaranos. Except myself, every man was very tired. Yet, after a bath and a cold meal, the Indians silently dug with paddles and machete a good grave for the dead man whom we had brought with us. And White did something that rather surprized me. He stood looking down at the grave a minute and then said farewell.

"*Adios, amigo,*" he said soberly. "I'm sorry. You stuck from start to finish with never a whine. No matter how rough it came, you always carried on. You were clear grit. And that goes for the other three boys we had to leave behind us."

Then he turned and walked away. And not another word did he speak that night.

The Indians looked after him, then at me. I told them what he had said. They nodded slowly. Then I quietly told them to come with me. The shore of the little port was a sandy slope, and we walked away along it, squatted, and talked low.

I asked first what they knew of me, Loco León. They said my name was known among them, from the Padamo to the Caura, as that of a *buen hombre*. That was well, I told them. And what did they know of the Yabaranos? Were they friends of the Maquiritares?

They had been friends, they said. The Yabaranos never came up into the Maquiritare hills, but the Maquiritares sometimes passed through the Yabarano country while roving about, and there had been no enmity. Then why did the Yabaranos now attack the Maquiritares?

The pair did not answer at once. Then one said—

"Because of the white man."

"Tell me how it came about," I requested.

"It was thus, Loco:

"We rested three days at their tribe-house on the Guaviarito. They were kind. But the women liked the face of the *blanco*. A tall young woman often came near him. He talked with her. Her man was away on a hunt.

"We Maquiritares slept in the big house, with the unmarried men. The *blanco* slept outside, in a little house made for him. Last night the moon was bright. It was late. The dogs barked loud. Men went to look. They saw the tall woman leave the house of the *blanco* and run to her little window. She crept in. It became quiet.

"The Yabaranos do not like such things. The men talked. When day came we told the *blanco* we all must go. We made ready. Men came and told us we must stay. The *blanco* must stay until the man of the tall woman came in. Then the two should settle about whose woman she was.

"The *blanco* was angry. He did not want the woman. He would go when he liked. He would go now. The father of the woman ran at him with a *tigre* spear. The *blanco* knocked it away and struck the father with his gun. The man fell. He looked dead.

"The rest rushed at us with clubs and spears. We threw the bags of the *blanco* into a *curial*. Two of us were killed. He shot four Yabaranos. He and the rest of us got away. They followed."

So that was it! I shut my mouth hard to keep my thoughts inside my head. After a minute or two I asked:

"Did he tell the woman to come to him? Or did she go unasked?"

"We did not hear him tell her to come. He talked to pass the time. He said she was handsome, and he would like to have a girl like her. But he laughed while he said it, and he left her to go and watch a dog-fight. He cared nothing about her. She was *loco*."

"Did he know she had a man?"

They thought a little, and looked doubtful. One said:

"Perhaps not. He asked no questions about anyone."

"I see. Now what will become of the woman? Will she be killed?"

"We do not know. She went to the *blanco*—he did not go to her. So she will be punished. Perhaps she will be killed."

"That is, it depends on what kind of man she has."

"It is so."

Then we arose and went back to the little fire. White was squatting there, and he glanced up, but said nothing. After looking at him a minute I walked away and left him.

Was he still grieving over the four faithful men who had died for him that day? Was he worrying about the fate of the woman who had come to him under the night moon? He was not. He had forgotten such small matters for something much more important.

His little mirror was in his hand, and by the firelight he was studying again that *zancudo* bite which might mar his face.

VII

ALL the next day my Maco-Maquiritare combination toiled back up the Venturi. And in all that day very little was said.

I told White that I had a little *ranchería* above here, and that I now was returning to it. When we reached that place, I said, we could decide on our future moves. No Yabaranos were in sight, nor was any other thing moving on the water; and there was nothing for us two to do but lie idle. He spent most of the day drowsing in the cabin. I, too, dozed and thought by turns.

The coming of the Maquiritares had made my plans more simple in a way. I knew well enough, without asking them, that they now would go back to their up-river home, whether White wished to go there or not. Even if they had to leave him without receiving any of the promised presents, they had finished their work for him. And if I, Loco León, known to them as a man of good heart, wished to go up the river also, they would gladly guide me to their people, with no thought of pay.

As I now could make no friends on the Manapiare, I must do what I had let the Macos think I meant to do—I must visit the Maquiritares. Since I had no intention of carrying my supplies farther onward as the Macos thought, I now had no real need of those Macos. But I decided to keep them with me. Then I should know where they were and what they did, and no man down the river would learn that a whole year's pay for balata work lay unguarded on a little *caño*. I did not trust the Macos over-much.

But I was a little puzzled about what to do with White. His work in Venezuela was over, unless he purposed now to explore the balata resources of the Ventuari as well as those of the Caura, which I much doubted. If he did intend anything of the sort, I had a few strong sentiments of my own on that subject—I was here not to enrich any North American company, or any other company, but to look out for the interests of Loco León. But I believed he now desired only to leave Venezuela forever. The question was, how?

There were only two ways; to go to San Fernando and then down the Orinoco, or to come with me up-stream and return to the Caura. The latter plan was by far the better, both for him and for me. The Caura route was much shorter than the roundabout Orinoco way, and, though perhaps more rough, it should be less dangerous; he could make the trip with a Maquiritare guide or two and travel by a course which he already knew—at least from Salta Para down—while of the Ventuari he knew nothing, and at San Fernando he would have hard work in getting men who would not cut his throat. As for myself, I could not send him down the Ventuari unless I gave him my own *curial*, which probably would never come back to me if I let it go; and I did not care to have any news of my movements reach the San Fernando murder-brigade just then.

On the other hand, I was not anxious to take with me among the Maquiritares a man who seemed always to be creating trouble about women. All the Maquiritare girls are very light of skin, some are slender and graceful, and a few have pretty faces. And the Maquiritare men, good-tempered though they usually are, have been known to kill outsiders who meddled with their women. I could see that these two Maquiritares of ours, though they had not blamed the *blanco* in their talk with me, really did not blame the Yabaranos either for the attack on them. And I knew that as soon as they reached their people the tale of that affair would be told.

That night, as White and I hung in our hammocks in my hut, I asked him what he planned to do now.

"To get out," he answered. "What's the best way?"

"Up the Ventuari and down the Caura," I told him. "That is the shortest."

He shook his head.

"Don't like it. What other ways have you got?"

"None, except to go down this Ventuari and then down the Orinoco."

"Then I'll do that. It's bad up above here, they tell me. Going down it'll be all smooth water, and——"

"Smooth water!" I interrupted. "You have seen the Orinoco only up to the Caura, and know nothing of what is higher up. You have not seen this Ventuari at all, except today. Let me tell you of the 'smooth water.'" And I described the *raudales* of the Orinoco.

"Oh, well, I can probably get a good boat and men at that town the maps show—San Fernando de Something-or-other," he said. "It's like Bolívar, I suppose."

"As much like Bolívar as a *caribe* is like an *arindajo*," I contradicted.* And I told of the Funes gang.

"Uh-huh," he drawled. "But I'll make out all right. If you'll sell me a little of this trade-stuff of yours to pay off my boys here with, and scare up a canoe somewhere for me to get to San Fernando in, I'll fix the rest of it."

"You will need all your handkerchiefs, then," I retorted, a little vexed. "If you think you have suffered from mosquitoes here, wait until you meet those between San Fernando and Atures."

At that he stiffened.

"Say, d'you mean that?"

"Mean it? It is the worst place on the whole river," I declared.

And I told him about that too. I did not stretch the truth at all. When one speaks

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***Caribe*—the bloodthirsty cannibal fish; called *piranha* in Brazil.

Arindajo—the friendly, brilliant gold-and-black Venezuelan oriole.

of the mosquito swarms of that part of the river, the simple truth is bad enough.

"Hm!" he muttered, lifting a hand to his *zancudo* sore. "How about the bugs up this river—the Ventuari? Are they any worse than here?"

"They are not even so bad. Up among the hills it is cooler, and only a few days from here there are no bugs at all—except *garrapatas* and such things, and not many of them. So the Maquiritares tell me; and they know."

After a minute he said:

"Well, maybe we'd better go that way after all. As you say, it's shorter."

I stared, and then I turned away to hide a grin. The man-killing bad waters and bad men of the Orinoco were nothing to him, but mosquitoes which might scar his skin like mine—those were more than he wanted to face.

Then, thinking ahead, I lost my grin and became very serious. And I said:

"Very well, *señor*. You have chosen the best way. I shall be glad to be of assistance. You may have any of these trade goods at the same price I paid in Bolívar, and I have no doubt that my Maquiritare friends above here will carry you safely and comfortably down the Caura, if I ask them to do so. But before we go among them I must speak frankly to you about one thing.

"These Maquiritares, as you must know by now, are a fine race of men—the finest Indians in Venezuela. They are intelligent, friendly when well treated, good-tempered, and brave. In many ways they are almost white men, and in some ways they are better than many men I have known who called themselves white. But still, they are Indians, and not only Indians, but sons of the most resolute fighters known among the Indians of South America—the Caribs."

"The —— you say! I never knew that," he broke in.

"It is so," I nodded. "They are of Carib stock; another name for them is Uayungomo. The Uayungomos of the Caura are the same people who, three hundred years ago, were called 'Ewaipanomo,' and fought so fiercely that other Indians spread terrible tales of them, saying that they had no heads and that their eyes were in their chests. And these Maquiritares of the Venturi headwaters, next to the Caura, also are 'Ewaipanomo.' They are not afraid to meet death. Neither are they afraid to give death to men who deserve it. And one thing which makes them feel that a man deserves death is—using their women as playthings."

I paused a minute. He said nothing. So I went on.

"Now it happens," I said, "that you are a very handsome man, and that women come easily to you. You will remember that I was in Bolívar when you were there, and I heard and saw certain things which I need not mention, except to say that you were near death because of those things. If you had been killed there, and the killer had been caught, there would have been punishment for him. But if for the same reason you should be killed up here, there would be no punishment. In these hills the only law is Indian law—Maquiritare law—Carib law."

There I stopped. He was silent several minutes. Then he yawned.

"Uh-huh," he said. "I understand perfectly. Don't worry. They're nothing to me—any of 'em. A Spanish *señorita* of more-or-less high degree is mighty interesting for awhile, I'll admit, even if she lives in a one-horse town like Bolívar; but these Indian girls who wear nothing but a little bead apron and never heard of a toothbrush—they're not even interesting. Just show me the quickest way out of here, and you can have this country and everything that goes with it. I'm through."

"That is very good," I told him. "We shall start onward tomorrow."

"Suits me." He yawned again. "By the way, thanks for the polite bunk about my looks. You're a mighty good-looking chap yourself, if you only knew it."

"Then I am glad I do not know it," I answered. "I have noticed that the men who do know it are often in trouble."

Leaving him to think that over, I went to sleep.

VIII

FOR several days after that we tramped the rolling hills of the Ventuari sabana, heading east, and gradually climbing. I had left my *curial* tied high by a long *chiquechique* rope, safe from any sudden rise of water following a storm, and my supplies well wrapped in *platani* leaves inside the hut.

The Macos, delighted to find that I was leaving my heavy goods behind, were more than willing to pack the few things I wished to carry—hammock, cartridges, matches, tobacco, and a few machetes and looking-glasses intended for gifts or pay. The pair of Maquiritares divided between them White's case and bag, and led the way. We had only to follow with our guns.

The guiding pair wound along at the bases of the sun-roasted hills, following animal paths at times, then abandoning them as they curved off in wrong directions. For about half of each day we would be tramping in the full glare of the sun, unprotected by the crooked little trees that grew thinly along the slopes. Then we would be in thick belts of forest through which usually flowed some small stream, and where we had to swing in half-circles to find rocky passes across the water, of which the Maquiritares knew.

Sometimes we climbed a small hill and stopped to breathe and look about, seeing mountains to east and west and south—rolling green ridges or sharp-cut precipices. Then we would go down and be hemmed in again by the hummocks until we met a narrow *caño* or, perhaps, a dead water in which lived the horrible *culebra de agua*—that huge snake which swallows men.

It would have been hot work, that tramping, if the northeast wind had not blown. But it did blow, fresh and steady, cooling the air and filling us with strength. And, except in the damp woods or at places where we met the winding river, there were no longer any mosquitoes. The air was too dry and the wind too cool to be to their liking. White put away his bandannas, and wore his helmet without a veil.

"Man, what a country!" he marveled one day as we stood on a hill-top, looking out over wide reaches of brown sabana and green forest, with a sweeping curve of the river shining blue among trees.

Near us a line of *moriche* palms stretched away like a long file of slim plume-hatted soldiers. Beyond rose the mountains, and above in a brilliant blue sky drifted great clouds white as foam. Miles upon miles of the Guayana upland lay around us, and nowhere in it could we see anything move.

"What a country!" he repeated. "I haven't seen anything like it before. Been cooped up by woods or river-banks. This is royal! No bugs—a wind like wine—and what a view! It's so beautiful it hurts!"

It was just that. To any man with an eye for beauty those wide reaches would have been wonderlands at any time; and to men who for endless weeks had been confined within walls of bush they seemed a paradise. I had been in the high Guayana sabana before, though not in this part of it; yet its changing masses of form and color, as I looked at them from different hills, stirred me as music does.

"Wonderful country," I agreed. "Beautiful to the eye, comfortable to the body, rich in game, yet inhabited only by the *tigre* and the *danta* and such things. No man lives here. The Maquiritares are men of the forest, and live in the rain-swept mountains to the east."

"The poor fools! They haven't brains enough to appreciate this," he said. "I'd like to live forever in a place like this."

Studying him a minute, I smiled and said nothing.

"But yet I don't know," he added presently. "I'd get tired of it, I suppose. It's like a beautiful woman—hits you hard at first, but after you've seen her awhile she gets to be the same old stuff all the time, and you've got to ramble on and find something new. Probably after I stayed here awhile and had all the fun I could I'd never want to see the place again. Well, let's go."

So we moved on.

Late that day we made camp, as usual, at the edge of a belt of woods, where we could hang our hammocks from trees and find plenty of wood for cooking. The Maquiritares and two of the Macos went into the forest to kill birds or beasts for the night meal, as they did each day. The other two Macos gathered wood and made all ready for the night, and we *blancos* bathed at a little stream where the water was clear and cool and no mosquitoes bit. Then we lay in our hammocks, smoked, and talked of whatever came to mind. It was in this talk that I learned something which made me understand him a little better.

He spoke in a careless way of his father, saying that unless he returned soon to Bolívar and sent a cable message to the States the "old man" would begin to worry about him. Talking on in a lazy manner, he let me know that his father was president of the company which had sent him down here; that he himself had traveled much while growing to manhood—in fact, he had toured around the world, and had seen so much of Europe that he was "sick of it;" and that he had taken this trip to Venezuela more because it was something that "everybody hasn't done" than because of any great interest in business. He also said his grandfather had made a fortune in gold-mines in the West of your United States, starting as a poor man and dying very rich.

"He was a husky old boy, grandpop was," he laughed. "Right up to the day he died he could swear a blue hole through a stone wall, pack a load of whisky that would floor two ordinary chaps, and knock a man cock-eyed with either fist. If he hadn't been killed by a motor truck hitting his roadster he'd have lived to be a hundred, I'll bet.

"They say he was a terror when he was a prospector out West, and from what I hear he must have been. For instance, right after he made his first strike some bad-men tried jumping his claim, and he got shot half to pieces; but the jumpers left that claim feet first. Folks didn't bother him much after that.

"He kept my grandmother shocked all the time—she was one of our Eastern aristocrats, who married him after he'd made his pile. It just tickled him silly to have her give a swell dinner and dance, and then to knock her guests speechless with some fierce break that he made on purpose. People talk yet about the things he used to do."

I laughed, but I thought too. And I saw several things. I saw that this man's carelessness of real danger, and probably his strong build, came to him from that fighting grandfather; and that his wonderful skin and his anxiety over his looks probably came from the "aristocratic" side of his family. I saw, too, that he was an official of the company only because he was the president's son; and that though he had stuck manfully to the work for which he had come to Venezuela, his only real object in life was to please himself. In all, I saw he was a mixture of "red blood' and "blue blood," as you Americans express it—and that the blue spoiled the red.

"Is your father like your grandfather?" I asked.

I got the answer I expected.

"Oh, no. He takes after my grandmother's side of the family. Very much of a city man, you know, and fond of society. He thinks I'm terribly wild, and he's all the time afraid I'll do something to disgrace him. Poor dad!"

He laughed again. Then he sat up suddenly.

"What's this?" he demanded.

I looked, and I too sat up.

Our hunters had returned, bring a *pauji* and a couple of *pavas*. But where four Indians had gone out, seven had come back.

One of the Maquiritares, smiling, came up and explained. Farther in the forest, he said, the hunters had come on a *caño*, and there they had found a little camp with three men in it. These men were Maquiritares from the Caño Cerbatana, farther up and on the other side of the Ventuari, who had paddled down here to hunt *baquidos*—wild hogs. Now they had come with our men in order to see Loco León, of whom they had heard.

I was glad to meet new friends from the Caño Cerbatana, I said, and they should come forward. The three, who had been standing back and looking me over, did come forward when told. Did they speak Venezolano? They made no answer; only smiled and looked at one another. I saw that they spoke no tongue but their own, which I never have learned—it is a very hard language, and few men know it.

So I gave them a little tobacco and motioned for them to squat while the food was made ready, intending then to ask a few questions through the Maquiritares who spoke Spanish. They leaned their weapons against trees, took little rolls of *cocomono* bark from their ear-lobes—all Maquiritares pierce their ears—and, with my tobacco, made *cigarros*. Then they squatted in silence, looking at me and White.

Now, I never had seen Maquiritares like them—that is, with such skins. Instead of the clean light-brown skins usually seen among those people, they had hides of dirty black. No, not like the skins of negroes—not an even, shiny black. These men looked as if they had been thickly powdered with chimney-soot and then thrown into water, leaving a washed-out black all over them. As they wore only the usual tiny clout of the Maquiritares, I could see that they were entirely covered with that color, from thick hair to wide-spread toes.

"Good Lord, what a rotten dirty bunch!" said White. "Look like a gang of coal-heavers. How do they get that way?"

"I do not know," I confessed. "The Maquiritares are a clean people. I will ask later on."

When we had eaten and the Indians were hanging around us in their hammocks—

the newcomers had brought their nets with them—I talked through the mouths of the Spanish-speaking Maquiritares. First, knowing that *cerbatana* means "blow-gun," I asked why the *caño* of the black men was so named. They said it was because there grew both the *chusti* cane used for the bore of the blow-guns and the *maui* wood used for the outer case, so it was a fine place to make *cerbatanas*. Did many people live there? No, they said; only one very small house of them. Was the hunting good there? Not so good. It was in the sabana, and the hunting was better in the thick hills beyond. Were the people of Caño Cerbatana sick? No, they were very well.

"Then why do they have black skins?" I demanded. "If they have no sickness, why are their skins not clean like those of other Maquiritares?"

There was a long pause. The Indians looked at one another, but said nothing. Then I thought perhaps these men had painted themselves dark in order to hunt better, just as they all paint their legs with wavy red stripes of *onorte* to keep snakes from biting them. I asked if that was it.

"No," one answered slowly. "It is not paint."

"Then is it dirt?"

"No!" He seemed a little offended.

"It is not dirt—it is not paint—it is not sickness? Then what?"

There was another pause.

"I, Loco León, your friend, ask you," I reminded them.

After a little more time the answer came.

"It is in the skin itself."

"Oh." I studied the black men again. "They were born with such skins? They are all of one mother?"

"No. They were born as we were. They are not brothers. Their skins were made black when they became men."

"But why? How?" I persisted.

Once more there was a silence. I began to feel that I was asking about some secret of the Uayungomos which should not be told to whites. But at length came this reply:

"Their blood was changed. There was put into a gourd of cold *yucuta*—manioc and water—the blood of two black creatures not the same—a black dog and a wild turkey, or a *mono viudita*—widow monkey—and a *pato real*. Then the men drank it. In one day they had fever. In three days they turned black. They can never turn light again."

I stared at the man, and he looked steadily back at me. Then he spoke in his own language to the blackened ones. They nodded together, and all looked at me, as if to say this thing was true.

"Well, I'm stumped!" muttered White, who had followed the Spanish talk. "Can this be possible?"

"Many things are possible to the Indians, *señor*, of which we whites know nothing," I told him. Then I asked the man:

"But why was this done?"

This time I got no answer at all. They quietly curled up in their hammocks and closed their eyes. Without telling me that this was not my business, they left me to realize it for myself. And, knowing that when they did not choose to answer they never would, I asked nothing further.

White suddenly turned his back to them.

"Savages!" he said. "Absolute savages. Imagine these men deliberately making themselves hideous for life like that! All for some fool Carib idea, of course. Think they're making themselves invisible to enemies, maybe, or something of the sort. I'd rather die by slow torture than do such a thing to myself. I don't want to look at 'em any more. Br-r-r! Good night!"

"*Buen' noche'*," I answered. And no more was said.

For a time I lay wondering about those blackened skins, and I thought of a number of things which later were to come back to me. But presently I forgot all about them while listening to the coughing snarl of a *tigre* somewhere out in the dark forest. After the beast grew silent I shut my eyes and thought no more about anything.

IX

THE next day we left the black men at their *caño* and tramped on. The day after that we left the sabana and entered the jungled sierra in which the Ventuari is born. And on the third day we reached the first round house of the Maquiritares.

With a canoe, we could have done in two days what we did in three; for as soon as the open lands ended we had to move slowly. We worked along the bank of the river, following its windings to keep from losing it and also to stay on fairly level ground;

and we had to cut much of our way, for there was no path. It was tiring work. But the Maquiritares told us that on the other side of the river, not far above, opened a *caño* on which was a house of their people. And about noon on that third day we found that opening.

At the mouth of the *caño* stood a little *ranchería* used as a port by the Indians when on fishing trips, but no canoe was there, nor were any men about. So, in order to cross, we had to go some distance farther up and make little *balsas*, or rafts, and cut rough paddles from thin tree-roots. Each *balsa* held four of us; and with paddles going fast and the current shoving us down, we swung into the mouth of the *caño* handsomely.

From the pole hut at the port a well-marked path led inland. And when we had eaten our noon meal I sent the Maquiritares and two of the Macos to tell the people of this *caño* that Loco León and another *blanco* were coming. It is always well to do something of this sort when first approaching a Maquiritare settlement, so that no bad mistakes will result from their suddenly seeing a stranger with a gun walking among them.

We waited about half an hour before following them, White spending most of the time fussing with his *zancudo* sore, which now had passed the worst stage and was beginning to improve, but which had left the usual raw red hole. He wanted to shave, too, but I would not wait for that; and when the rest of us started he was wise enough to go with us.

For the next three hours we walked steadily along the winding trail, seeing nowhere any sign of men except the path itself and the footprints of our own Indians. Then we came out on the bank of the *caño* again, and on the farther side we saw a canoe with a couple of Maquiritare lads in it. Their faces were new to me, but I knew they had been sent there to wait for us. So I called, and they brought the *curial* across.

On the other side the path climbed a stiff slope, and among the trees at the top I looked for the usual round house with wattle-and-mud walls and conical palm roof. But it was not there. Only a small open shelter stood there, and we had to walk nearly half an hour longer through the green-barked forest before we came into the clearing.

"These chaps certainly live far enough in," grumbled White. "Apparently they don't care for visitors."

"They do not," I agreed. "Two or three hundred years ago all the Caribs suffered cruelly from the Conquistadores seeking El Dorado, and they have never forgotten."

When we reached the house, however, there was no sign of the long memory I spoke of—except that no women were in sight. A number of light-skinned men, carrying no arms, came forward from the door, smiling and giving us silent welcome. Among them I saw two faces which looked familiar, and presently I recalled them as those of young fellows who had worked balata for me on the Padamo. This was good luck. I foresaw at once that I should have little difficulty in getting men here to gather gum in my new district down the river.

If the people here had already heard from our messengers the tale of the Yabarano fight—and I felt quite sure that they had—they gave no hint of it in their faces. They looked at White in the frank, steady way of their nation, and when they had seen him from hat to boot-soles they turned their eyes back to me with no change of expression. Soon we were led into the big central room which forms the men's quarters in every Maquiritare house, and there we were shown hammocks and invited to rest.

Looking at the faces round about, I asked who was *capitán* here. One of the men who formerly had worked for me said the chief was not here; he had left that morning on a hunting trip, and would not return for four days. This was a little disappointing, as I had meant to talk with the leader about the balata work. But there would be time enough for that later. So, swinging slowly in a hammock and resting, I told them I had thirst and asked whether the *assehi* palm grew here. At once I was told that it did. I said that I should like some *yucuta assehi.* Two lads picked up gourds and went out.

This *assehi* palm, *señores*, bears at the top of its straight stem a great cluster of round red fruits about as wide as my thumbnail, with a large stone inside. When these are peeled and pulped in a gourd of water a drink is formed which is very refreshing and is the color of pale blood. By putting into it a handful of loose manioc one has drink and food together. And, since *yucuta* is manioc and water, the same thing with those red fruits added is *yucuta assehi*—or, as we call it commonly, *yucut' 'sehi.*

Perhaps if I should offer you some of it now, in this hotel, you would not care for its flavor. But when you have been for months in the wilderness, living on very rough food and drinking warm dirty river-water, it tastes very good indeed.

While I waited for this drink to be made I talked lazily to all the men around me, giving them such news of matters outside the hills as would interest them. Knowing that they wished also to hear something from me about White, although they asked no questions, I said he was a *Norte Americano* who had traveled on the Caura and now was returning to that river, and that we were going together to the Maquiritare settlement highest up on the Ventuari, from which the two Maquiritares now with us had come. From there, I said, he would cross to the Caura, then go down to the Orinoco, and return to his own country.

At this I saw several of them glance at one another; and I thought they looked a little relieved, as if they felt it would be well for all if this man left their country. There was no doubt in my mind now that they had heard of the trouble on the Manapiare.

Then one of my former Padamo men asked whether I too intended going down the Caura. I told him no, I planned to remain on the Ventuari, and to remain there a long time. Faces brightened at this. Men smiled, and one said—

"*Bueno!*"

This pleased me much; for I doubt if there is another *blanco* in all Venezuela whom the Maquiritares would be glad to have on their river. But I kept my pleasure to myself. Talking on, I let them know that I wished the *Norte Americano* to journey unharmed out to the Orinoco, and that I wanted a *curial* and men to carry us both to the top of this stream.

When I was ready, I said, I would come down again, and then I would speak to their *capitán* about a matter of business. Those who understood Spanish nodded, as if knowing already that my business would be that of the balata. And one said that whenever I wished to go on up the river the canoe and men would be ready.

Then came the red drink. There were two gourds of it. One was given to me, the other to White, who had said not a word. I drank half of mine at once, for my throat was dry. Then I asked White:

"What is the matter?"

He was looking down with narrowed eyes at the blood-colored mixture. He had not tasted it.

"What is this stuff?" he demanded. "Don't like its looks."

"*Yucut' 'sehi,* and very good," I said. And I told him how it was made. "Try it," I urged him, "and you will find it most refreshing."

"Hm! It's a new one to me. This *yucut'* stuff, now—remember what those black fellows said a few nights ago? Blood in *yucut'* — remember? This looks bloody enough. I'm not drinking it."

I stared. Then I laughed loud.

"*Valgame Dios!* Of what have you fear?" I scoffed. "That this harmless drink will make you a negro? I have drunk it many a time, and I am even more white than you. Have you traveled so long with these faithful Maquiritares only to fear them now?"

He reddened angrily.

"I'm not afraid of anything!" he growled. "I simply don't like the looks of this stuff and I don't want it. That's all."

I stopped laughing and answered him very coolly.

"Very well, *señor.* But you might at least taste it for the sake of courtesy, unless you think it unnecessary to be courteous to those who are trying to be courteous to you. It has taken some work for these people to make the drink for you, and they hoped you would be pleased with it. But do as you like."

And I drank more of my own with great relish.

The Indians watched him. One said something, and several others snickered in a way that made White's eyes glitter. Then one of my Padamo boys, grinning, said—

"*No es sangre.*"

"You see, *señor,*" I said. "He says 'It is not blood.' The others think you are afraid of anything that looks like blood."

"Oh, they do! Well, just to show 'em——"

He lifted the gourd and drank off all the liquid.

"And if they still think so," he added in a hard tone, "I'll take on any three of 'em right now, bare-handed, and show 'em how much I'm afraid of blood."

I laughed again, as if the whole thing were a joke. The Indians, not understanding his words and seeing me laugh, smiled also.

"*Es bueno?*" asked one.

"Hm! It doesn't taste so bad, at that," White admitted. "*Si—muy bueno*—very good. *Gracias.*"

And before handing back the gourd he scooped up the manioc remaining in the bottom and chewed it.

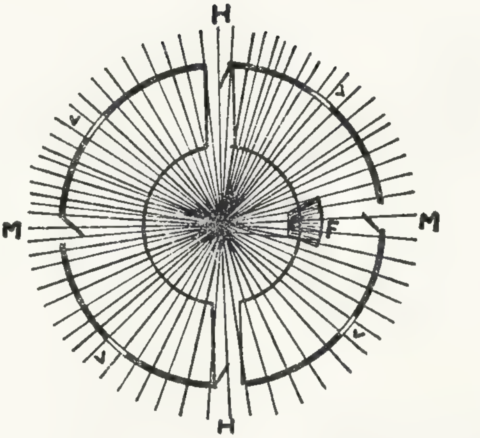
I ate mine also, and then for a little while longer we lay in the hammocks and smoked. Some of the Maquiritares lounged near us in friendly silence. Others drifted away to talk with the Macos and begin the slow bargaining for the basket of *curare* poison they had brought to trade. One of the small boys who had been standing about and watching everything decided to leave us, and did so by disappearing through the bark wall. White, who seemed to have recovered his temper, saw him go and spoke.

"Just how do these people arrange the family quarters?" he asked. "I've been in these houses of theirs before, down on the Caura, but only in the men's room, like this. I know the married folks live between the walls—there's no other place for them—but how do they arrange things?"

"I will show you," I promised.

Speaking to one of the older Maquiritares, I told him I would like to show my friend the whole house, and that if there was no good reason why we should not do so we would soon walk into the other part of it. He looked a little doubtful, but went to the bark and slipped through it as the boy had done. While we waited for him to return I described the plan of the place.

Since you have not seen these houses, *señores*, perhaps I had best describe them to you also. They are, as I have said, perfectly round, the outer wall being of poles and woven sticks plastered with mud. This wall makes a big circle. Inside it is a smaller circle made of great slabs of bark, which are attached to one another and to upright poles. This is the inner wall, which forms a partition between the central room occupied by the bachelors and the part used by the married ones. These married ones, with their children, live side by side in the ring between the walls, their little homes being divided from one another only by a few poles, a half-made hammock, or some such marker.



PLAN OF MAQUIRITARE TRIBE-HOUSE
H-MEN'S DOORS M-WOMEN'S DOORS
V-WINDOWS F-SMOKE-HOLE HOOD

In the outer wall are four small doors. Two lead through passages into the men's room; the other two open into the married quarters. There are also tiny windows, through which the children, and sometimes the women, squeeze in and out when it is more convenient than using the doors. In the bark wall are slabs having one side unattached, which can be used as entrances to the central room; these snap back into place by their own stiffness, making the wall seem solid. The married men can come and go by any entrance they like, either inside or outside; but the unmarried men must use only their own doors, and the girls must keep out of the men's room.

Over all is the circular palm-thatch roof, coming to a point, with a large smoke-hole protected by a sort of hood which throws off rain. Because of this great sloping roof, we call the Maquiritare houses *paraguas*—umbrellas.

In such a house as this may live forty or more people. In a smaller *paragua*, housing only a few, there may be no inner wall, all living together in one room. A man roving as I do about the Parimas often finds little houses of this kind, but they are usually old and empty.

All this I told White. Then the Maquiritare came through the bark again and stood waiting. When we arose he held the rough slab aside for us, and as we passed through the opening he followed us. The bark snapped shut like the jaws of a trap.

We stepped along slowly, finding hammocks slung across the way, fringes of cotton strings hanging from rafters, and now and then a low pole barring us until we straddled over it. There were very few women in the place: too few. Those who were there were nursing very young babies or cooking food in clay vessels over tiny fires. They paid no attention to us, at least while we were looking their way; and we gave very little attention to them. In fact, we looked less at the women than at the dogs we found lying here and there—the usual small black-haired, cruel-eyed hunting-dogs of the Maquiritares—and the setting hens crouching against the walls. In one little "apartment," as White called it, we found also a tame *paují* which, our guide said, had been caught when a very young bird, and which followed us a few steps.

When we found ourselves back at the place where we had started White yawned.

"Let's get some air," he said.

We went outside through the nearest doorway. And there we saw the rest of the women.

They had left the house while we talked within, and now they were busy at their usual task—making cassava bread. Some were pulping the roots on the graters which they make for the purpose, others pressing the poisonous juice from the pulp in the long baskets, and some sifting the pressed grains in their open-work *guapas*, or trays.

As usual, they wore only the square bead aprons, hanging from low on the hips almost to the knees. They looked at us, but only for a moment; then went on with their work. I knew they had been told by their men that all was well. Otherwise not one of them would have been in sight.

From the corner of my eye I watched White. He glanced at the women, but seemed more interested in their work than in them. Soon he turned his back on them and looked at the round house.

"He is learning sense," I thought.

"It's a regular circus," he said. "You know, I've noticed before that these houses were shaped just like the round circus-tents up home. But now that I've seen the rest of the works it's all the more so. Two rings, and dogs and hens and a peacock and women and kids—a two-ring circus with its animals. Lord, what a way for human beings to live! Interesting to look at, of course, when you know you're going out. But to live this way year in and year out—I'd go clean off my nut if I knew I had to do it!"

In later years I was to think often of that careless remark.

X

FIVE days later we reached the last and largest *paragua* on the Ventuari—the place which the Maquiritares call Uaunana: the round house from which, weeks ago, six young fellows had gone to visit friends on the Caura, and to which now only two of the six returned.

Yet, in returning, those two brought with them more men than had gone away; for with them traveled four of their own race from the *caño* down below, and we two *blancos*. So where six had left, eight came in.

Before leaving the house where White drank his first *yucuta assehi*, I had given my Macos their presents and told them to go home whenever they liked. But I had also talked secretly with the oldest Maquiritare, who seemed to be in authority there while the *capitán* was away, and received his promise that when the Macos went down-stream four well-armed Maquiritares should go with them; and that these four should stop at my *caño* and remain there guarding my supplies until I came down again. I had his word that the guards would stay at my place even if I did not reappear before the falling of the heavy rains. So now I knew that all was well behind me.

It had been a hard journey, these last five days. We had made no stops to visit other *paraguas* which might be up various *caños*, but had worked steadily toward Uaunana; and stiff work it had been. Here in the high sierra the river seemed to hold even more *raudales* than below; and the last of these was so bad that the Indians would not even approach it.

This was the terrible *raudal* of Monoblanco. To avoid it the Maquiritares worked the *curial* up a winding little stream at the left and took to the land; and for a long, hard day after that we were fighting our way over steep, densely jungled hills—four of them in all—following a trail so faint that even my wilderness-trained eyes often could not see it.

That day we ate nothing between dawn and dark; we made no halts, for the traverse had to be made in one day if we were to find shelter from drenching rain which poured down on us all day long. When at last we again reached the Ventuari, well above the *raudal*, and found there a little *platanî* hut where we could swing our hammocks in a half-dry place, we were a starving, exhausted crew.

At this upper port we were lucky enough to find a canoe—or, rather, an old, abandoned thing that had been a canoe. It was so battered and cracked that the Indians had to spend half a day in tightening it up. When all eight of us were in it the gunwales were only an inch above the water, and in spite of its pitching and patching it still leaked so badly that two men had to keep bailing all the time.

Whenever we met a *raudalito*, as we did several times, everybody had to go overboard and lift the crazy boat up through the bad water. At one such place the current threw my legs from under me, and I was carried down for some distance before I could swim to shore. I was glad that in those swift upland waters lived neither *caiman* nor *caribe*.

Such little accidents as this, however, are nothing to the river rovers of the Parimas; so long as a man lives through them he laughs and goes on, knowing that the next time he may split his head on a rock and laugh no more. Soon after this swim of mine we turned from the river into a narrow *caño*—the river itself now had become so small that it was hardly more than a rocky creek—and, a short distance in, found several dugouts at an opening in the bank, from which rose a well-trodden path. This, the Maquiritares said, was the Caño Uaunana.

I told the two who lived here to go ahead and inform their *capitán* that Loco León would soon come up the hill. Showing no more excitement than if they had been merely on a day's fishing trip, the pair climbed the steep slope and were gone among the trees. The rest of us squatted in the shade and waited a little while. Then we went upward.

The Maquiritares had told me that this settlement of Uaunana was big, with *mucha gente*—many people. Knowing that they live usually in small groups, I expected to find here a *paragua* only a little larger than the one we had visited farther down. But when we came into the clearing near the top of the hill I saw that this place really was big. The round house was very wide; around it stood a ring of smaller shelters, open-sided, square-cornered, and ridge-roofed, where the cassava-making and other work could be carried on unhampered by rain; and at one of the doors stood a crowd of men, looking our way.

Though I learned later that nearly half of the men of Uaunana at that moment were away hunting or making dugouts or doing other things in the woods, those in sight numbered more than all the people of the settlement down-stream. That was why this place was so near the river; the tribe was large enough to defend itself against anything but a large body of riflemen, which was very unlikely ever to come here.

Straight to that door I went, and there I asked for the *capitán*. Since the tribe evidently was strong, I rather expected to meet a big, stern-faced leader. But the man who came to meet me, and whose quiet air of authority showed him to be the chief, was not at all of that type. He was shorter than I, with a kind, gentle face and big brown eyes that seemed to smile. Yet he was strongly built, and the calm eyes showed much intelligence. I judged him to be a man who loved peace, but who, if he must fight, could fight coolly and wisely.

Like the other Indians, he looked at me, then at White, then back at me, with no change of expression. When I told him who we were and why we were there together, he nodded slightly, but seemed not to understand all I said. So I asked whether he spoke Spanish.

"*Pocito*," he answered. "Only a little."

Then he moved his head toward the door. We went into the central room and sat in hammocks, and I looked around at faces. Among those new to me I saw four or five from the Padamo. Calling one of these men to me, I asked if the Rio Padamo had moved since I left it—I was finding many Padamo faces on the Ventuari. He smiled and answered that the Padamo was where it had been, but that very few Maquiritares were there, and soon there might be none.

For some time past, he said, the Maquiritares of that river had been talking of moving elsewhere. All the Maquiritares do this at times, for they are—how do you say it?

Semi-nomadic—yes, that is it. They live for a time in one place, and then they abandon that place for a new one, perhaps many miles away. And now, since I had left the Alto Orinoco on my journey to Bolívar, the savage Guaharibos east of the Padamo had become very bad, as I had foreseen. They had repeatedly attacked the Maquiritares, for no particular reason, and in the fighting both sides had lost men. So, since the Maquiritares had no desire to remain there longer, they had journeyed up into the higher hills and gone to whatever places pleased them best. Most of them now were on the upper Caura, not many days from this settlement.

At this I was all the more glad that I had left the Padamo for the Ventuari, and thanked the luck of Loco León for leading me here. As this was the place where White's way and mine were to part, I felt that I had best be about my own business of getting men. But I said nothing of it just then. I only asked how many men here spoke Spanish.

Very few, I was told. These people of Uaunana seldom went near enough to Spanish-speaking people to need the language. They were not so wild as the Maquiritares of the little Rio Gueseta and some other small branches of the Ventuari, who would have nothing whatever to do with any *blancos,* but they were well satisfied to stay here and see nobody but their own people. Then the man telling me these things grinned and added, as if it were a great wonder, that one of the Uaunanans who could speak Spanish was a woman.

She was the oldest daughter of the *capitán,* he said; and whenever a Maquiritare who knew anything of the Spanish tongue came here she made him give her new words and tell of all he had seen in other places. It seemed a great joke to him, so I laughed. Then I asked more about my Padamo people—where they were, and how to reach them from here, and so on. The wordy daughter of the *capitán* was quickly forgotten.

After a time White broke into our talk.

"Say, can we get more of that *yucut' 'sehi* here?" he asked. "I feel as if it would just hit the right spot."

"Aha! So you are beginning to like it," I said. "I think it can be had. I too would like some."

So I asked, and before long we each had a gourd of it. When it was gone he arose and yawned.

"Go on with your palaver," he said. "I'm going to walk around and inspect the works."

And he strolled to the door, stopping once to look at a drum hanging on the bark wall. The two Maquiritares who had been with him on the Manapiare drifted out with him.

For some time after that I talked with those who could understand me well, and, at times, with the calm little *capitán.* I was not yet ready to speak of balata—that would come later—but I learned all I could about the new *paraguas* on the upper Caura; for if I could get the same Indians to do my work on the Ventuari who had done it on the Padamo, it would be much more simple than dealing with new ones. Also, it would be far easier to gather new ones when I had the others to talk for me. That is always the best way to bring our Indians to you, *señores*—to talk to them through their own people, who can tell the doubters that you are a *buen hombre.*

By the time I had learned what I wished to know and had decided to make a journey southward to the Caura—for that was what I did decide upon—it was quite late in the day. White had not come back. Now an Indian came in and said a few words to the *capitán.* The ruler's eyes hardened a little; but then he looked as calm as ever, and made neither move nor answer. Whatever he had been told, it seemed not to disturb him. But I had noticed that slight narrowing of the eyes. And, for the first time since he had gone out, I thought of White.

Waiting a minute or two, I then stood up, stretched myself, and slowly walked out. The *capitán* silently came after me. Outside the door I saw nothing unusual. Neither did I see White. As if only exercising my legs, I lounged along the curving wall until I had gone nearly one-third of the distance around the *paragua.* Then I saw White—and women.

He was leaning against a corner-post of a shed where men seemed to be slowly working at something, and, with his wide helmet tilted over one eye, he was smilingly talking to several young women just outside. Rather, he was talking to only one of those girls; the others were standing and watching. The one girl seemed to be talking more than he.

As we came near he drew from a pocket

a small leather pouch and shook into his palm a few silver coins. These he gave to the young woman, who took them eagerly.

"*Doce reales*," he said. "*No tengo mas.*"

And he shook the empty pouch to prove that those twelve *reales* really were all he had.

"What is this, *señor?*" I asked sharply. "You had best be careful."

"Hullo, old Calamity," he laughed. "Stand and deliver. This young lady is taking up a collection for herself. Says she wants *plata* to make herself a silver necklace. I'm cleaned—gave her a dollar and twenty cents. Now you come across."

And, pointing at me, he told her:

"*Él tiene mucha plata.* He has much silver."

She turned and looked steadily at me. I grinned, but not at her—it was at the joke he had put on me. But, seeing me smile, she smiled back and asked—

"*Plata?*"

I had no silver money with me, nor any other except a few gold pieces which I did not intend to give away. So I had to shake my head. She was disappointed, and her face showed it, but she did not ask again. She looked me all over, and I did the same by her.

Remembering what the Maquiritare had told me about the one woman here who spoke Spanish, it was easy for me to guess that she was the daughter of the *capitán*. Indeed, I might have known it without first hearing of her; for she looked like the chief, and an ordinary girl would not have dared to be so forward with a *blanco*.

She was pretty. Her brown eyes were larger than her father's and filled with a warm glow; her face was more round, her features more softly marked, than his; and, though she had the strong frame of the chief, her figure was very shapely. From thick black hair, cut straight around in the Maquiritare fashion, to her well-formed feet, she was more nearly perfect than any Indian girl I ever saw elsewhere.

Like the other women, she wore only the bead *guayuco*, or apron, and bead armlets near the shoulders. And the bright sun lit up a skin hardly darker than my own bronzed face, and as clean and clear, though not so fine, as White's.

Having seen what Loco León looked like, she turned her eyes to her father; and, laughing like a child, she shook the coins jingling in her hands and then held them for him to see. He glanced at them with a little smile, took one and scanned it on both sides, and handed it back. In his usual quiet tone he spoke a few words. Without replying or looking at either of us, she ran to the house, calling to some one within—perhaps her mother. The other girls followed her, probably to see the *reales* more closely and to envy her.

We men laughed a little, and White swung toward the Indians inside the hut, who had stopped working and were closely watching their *capitán*. Now their grave faces relaxed and they resumed work—they were hollowing out a log trough.

"And that's the way it goes," said White. "A chap stops on the corner—a shed-corner, this time—to watch some fellows work, and along comes the female of the species and tells him it's tag-day. And what can the poor boob do? Dig down, as usual."

I said nothing. There seemed nothing to say. But I thought he must have talked some time with the chief's daughter before she felt well enough acquainted to ask for a present.

"Funny little cuss, isn't she?" he added. "Got her nerve right with her. Says her name's Juana, and her father's is Juancito. How do all these Indians get Spanish names? Every one I've known had one."

"They never tell their real names," I told him. "Every Maquiritare gives himself a Spanish name when talking with a *blanco*. Why they do it I do not know. When do you leave for the Caura, *señor?*"

"Oh, I don't know," he yawned. "Pretty soon. Guess I'll rest a day or so. Does this air up here make you sleepy? I've been yawning my head off all the afternoon."

"It is because you have reached a resting-place," I said. "I often feel so when I have finished a hard trip. But I do not feel that I have finished this one, so I am not yet sleepy. Tomorrow, or the next day, I turn south to the Caura."

"So soon? I'm going to that same river, but north instead of south, and in a few days instead of tomorrow."

"I should like to see you safely started homeward before I leave," I said.

He swung and looked me in the eye; and probably he saw in my face what I did not say.

"See here, old chap," he said in an annoyed tone, "you've pulled me out of a couple of holes, and I'm awfully obliged, and all that sort of thing. If I had a chance I'd do as much for you, and I'd back you to the last shot in the locker. At the same time, I'm free, white, and more than twenty-one, and mighty well able to stand on my own two legs. So far as my little personal comings and goings and talkings and doings are concerned, do you mind attending to your own —— business?"

"Not at all, *señor*," I said coldly.

And I turned and left him.

XI

IT WAS the morning of the third day after that when I started for the Caura—or, as it is called in its upper part, the Merevari. And when I left Uaunana, White had not prepared to go.

He had paid his two men, and paid them handsomely, with the trade goods bought from me at my *caño*. He had asked, too, about the route used in passing over the sierra and reaching the Caura, and had promised high pay to any four men who would go with him to the first settlement near the Orinoco. But he had not yet obtained the men, and seemed to be in no hurry about getting them. It would be a tough trip, he said, and he was well satisfied to rest a few days before starting it.

After what he had said to me about minding my own business, it certainly was nothing to me whether he started soon or late, or not at all. But, without letting him know it, I spoke quietly to Capitán Juancito urging him to see that good men were ready to go with the *blanco* whenever he felt like leaving.

Juancito coolly said any of his men who went would be good men; that he himself would not pick any crew for the traverse, but would let the men decide the matter for themselves. He reminded me that this *blanco* had caused the deaths of four out of six Uaunanans who had been with him, and said he would have no hand in sending out more of his people with such a man. Neither would he stop them from going if they wished to do so.

With that the matter was dropped. As I say, White did not know of this talk; for I said nothing to him about it, or about any other thing that was not strictly my own affair. I was taking him at his word and letting him "stand on his own two legs." Whenever he wished to talk about anything I met him half-way. At other times I kept my mouth shut.

This did not mean, though, that I also shut my eyes and ears. I keep them open wherever I go. And I noticed that the wilful little Juana was giving a good deal of attention to the handsome *blanco*.

He was doing just what he said he would do—resting; and he spent a good half of each day lolling in his hammock, which hung beside mine in one of the open-sided but thick-roofed sheds, where we had plenty of air but were protected from the night rains which break suddenly in those hills. To this house Juana and other girls came now and then, standing near his hammock for half an hour at a time while Juana asked for the Spanish names of things he had which were new to her—clothing and mosquito-net and watch and cartridges and so on—or showed him how many words she already knew.

Yet I thought it was not so much her interest in new things as in the man himself that drew her there; and I was quite sure of it because she never asked me the same questions, though I knew Spanish much better than he. Indeed, she did not talk to me at all.

The *capitán* knew all this, of course, but he seemed not to mind. And, though it was a little unusual, there was nothing about it to worry him or any one else. Other girls always were with her, men were close at hand, every one who cared to look or listen could see and hear all, and after sundown she was within the walls of the tribe-house. If Juancito, knowing what he knew, had no objections to these talks it surely was not the place of Loco León to disapprove.

One thing which amused me was White's fondness for the drink he had once refused to touch—*yucuta assehi*. As I have said, it is a very satisfying refreshment when one happens to like it; and now he liked it. He even made a joke of his first aversion to it. Whenever he wanted some of it he would say——

"Well, Loco, will you join me in drinking another bucket of blood?"

The Maquiritares, too, always seemed to find it amusing to see him put away a gourdful of the stuff; and after he had asked for it two or three times they made a big potful of it at once, so that it should be ready whenever he wanted more. Every one seemed to like him well enough, and there was no good reason why they should not. He had not abused his men, and the only bad memory of him that they had was the affair of the Yabarano woman, for which he was not so much to blame.

So, knowing these people would treat him as a friend unless he gave them good reason to do otherwise, I left him there. With a couple of my former Padamo men and a light, new *curial*, I went away at sunrise. White and I shook hands and wished each other luck, and he tried to thank me for what I had done, but I cut him short.

"*Es nada*. Say no more about it. *Vaya con Dios*," I said. And I went down the hill and out of the *caño* of Uaunana.

After about an hour of hard paddling against the current we swung into a small stream at the right, coming in from the south. When we had gone as far as we could among its rocks we tied the *curial* and took to our legs. And for several days after that we worked over and through the sierra dividing the Ventuari and Merevari countries. Then we reached a new *paragua* of the Maquiritares. There I found more men of the Padamo, and with them I visited for some days.

From there I went on to other new houses made by the people who had left the region where the Guaharibos now were, and in all I found welcome from men who had bled the balata for me during the last season. When at length I turned north again to the Ventuari I did not much care whether the people of my new river would work for me or not; for I had the promise of the Merevari Maquiritares that the coming of the heavy rains in May would find them on their way to my *caño* below the roaring falls of Quencua. The luck of Loco León, which has always been with me in matters of importance, still held good.

With the same two men who had gone out of the Caño Uaunana with me, I came back into it late on a day of showers. It had been more than a month since I left it. Idly I wondered how far from Bolívar the North American was now. If he had left this place within a week after my going—and it seemed hardly likely that he had stayed longer—he should be near the Orinoco, if not on it; for the journey from here to the Caura was a matter of only a few days for the Maquiritares, and with the current behind him he should travel fast.

As on my first visit here, I found no other men on the *caño* or at the port. And, as then, I let the two Maquiritares go up the hill path first, though I did not wait this time for them to announce my coming—I followed close behind. We had almost reached the *paragua* when one of my men saw something which I had not noticed. Pointing, he spoke to me.

"*El blanco est' aquí*," he said. "The white is here."

He was pointing at the open shelter where White and I had slept. There, true enough, still hung a hammock. It was not a Maquiritare hammock—theirs is always made of white cotton, while this was a yellow network of *cumari* palm-fiber, such as I myself use; a hammock made by the Guahibos of Colombia and sold here in Bolívar by traders, and the strongest and coolest bed one can buy. And the straight lines of tight-drawn cords and the big bulge in the middle showed some one was in it.

As I have said, it was late, and the sky was dark with more rain; so the light was dim. Noticing that the hammock showed no movement, I concluded that White was asleep, and passed on to the doorway where a few men stood watching us. Nobody else was in sight, and my stomach told me it was meal-time. Inside the house I found most of the bachelors eating, though some had finished and were in their hammocks. One slid through the bark wall, returning in a minute with Juancito. He promptly saw to it that I was given cassava and roast *baquido*, and until I had eaten little was said. Then I asked about White.

Yes, he still was here, I was told. He had spoken lately of going, and men were ready to journey with him to the Caura. But for a day or two he had been a little sick. It must be the fever. He had been very well until two nights ago, when the sickness came on him. Since then he had hardly been out of his hammock.

No, it did not seem to be serious, they said. Probably he would go in another day or two. He was in a bad temper because he had had to stay these two days. He had meant to leave two mornings ago.

These things I learned only by asking

questions. They told me nothing unless I asked, and looked often at Juancito. He said nothing at all; but I thought his eyes looked a little hard. Nobody smiled, nobody made any joke about the *blanco* and the *yucuta* drink. I felt that Uaunana was weary of its visitor.

Asking no more, I said I was tired and would hang my hammock outside. And I walked out, finding that while I ate and talked it had grown very dark. But I knew my way about, and my matches were few, so I made no light. Working quietly, I slung the hammock where it had been before, opened my light blanket—the nights are cool in the hills—and, after taking off my *alpargatas* and loosening my belt, lay down. Then White awoke.

"*Quièn es?*" he demanded.

"Loco León."

"Oh. Back again? Glad to see you. Have a good trip?"

"*Si.* I hear you have been a little sick."

"Yes, —— the luck!" he snarled. "Of all the dirty, rotten, low-down, lousy holes to be sick in— Say! Know what these stinking thieves did? Stole my mirror!"

I nearly laughed out. To lose so small a thing and be so savage about it struck me as funny. But I was not much pleased with his words about the people who had been so friendly to him, and presently I answered:

"I have seen much worse places to be sick in. These people are neither stinking nor lousy, as you say. And your little glass must have dropped somewhere."

"It didn't drop!" he half-shouted. "I had it here when I got the fever. Some sneak-thief swiped it when I didn't know what was going on. That's what gets me—robbing a sick man after he's been a good fellow. To —— with the whole lousy pack of 'em!"

The Indians had spoken truly when they said his temper was bad. As for the little mirror, it might have been found and kept by some one of the children. I had no doubt that it would come back to him.

"Have they not taken care of you?" I asked.

"Oh, that little fool of a Juana has been pawing me over and giving me stuff," he growled. "She's a pest. I'm going to get out of here as quick as I can. I'm going tomorrow!"

"That is good, *señor*," I said, humoring him. "You must be feeling better."

"I do, some. I'm hot and weak, and I'm beginning to itch all over. But I'm better. Got to get a bath tomorrow. I haven't had my clothes off since the fever hit me. Got any quinine or any other medicine?"

"Nothing. There is quinine at my *caño* below Quencua, but none here."

"And I lost all my medical outfit at Salta Para. Well, I'll be out of this —— hole soon."

I made no answer to this. Instead I began talking of my journey to the Merevari, hoping to get his mind off himself. He listened, seeming interested, but I heard him turn and scratch repeatedly. It was very plain that, as he said, he itched all over. I wondered just what was the matter with him. But I did not let him know that I noticed it.

"What have you been doing to pass the time here?" I asked, ending my tale of travel.

"Oh, fooling around. Been hunting—got three *tigres* and a lot of other stuff—and hugging my hammock and—oh, just been a plain fool. I ought to have gotten out of here when you did."

Something about his tone made me suspicious. In a joking way I asked—

"You have had no visitors after sunset?"

"What's that to you?" he snapped.

"Nothing. I was only thinking of the Manapiare."

There was a long silence.

"So you know about that," he said slowly. "Well, I've never made any claims that my blood is ice-water."

"Quite so," I agreed. "You were speaking awhile ago about the 'little fool of a Juana' who is such a 'pest,' and so on." There I paused.

"Oh, yes. She's been interesting, but she's grown tiresome. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Nothing. *Buen' noche'*."

No more was said. I lay awhile thinking, and wondering how Juana had succeeded in fooling her father. But while men are men and girls are girls, there will always be ways for them to meet while older people sleep. White still lived, showing that no trouble had broken out. And now that he was going, all would be well. So I turned over and slept. The last thing I heard was White scratching.

A sudden startled curse roused me. Day had come again. White was sitting up in his hammock, staring at his hands. As I saw those hands and the face above them, I jumped as if hit by cold water.

The hands were smutted as if by soot. So was the face. So was the chest showing behind his unbuttoned shirt.

The beautiful skin which had made this man so handsome now was repulsive. It looked filthy. White was white in name only. He was no longer a *blanco*.

XII

ONLY once in my life, *señores*, have I seen in another man's face the look that then came into that of White. That was when, down the Orinoco, a man whose *curial* had capsized was dragged under by a *caimán*. He clung desperately to his overturned boat while I and other men drove ours at full speed to rescue him; but just as I was reaching for him the brute under him tore him loose and pulled him down.

That man was lost, and he knew it. It was a long time before I stopped seeing his awful eyes in my dreams. And now in the dilated eyes of White I saw the same look.

He stared into my face with the hopeless horror of the man dragged to a frightful death. And, seeing in my expression that this thing was true, he seemed to crumple up. I grabbed him to keep him from falling.

"My God!" he whispered hoarsely. "My God!"

I could say nothing. I was shocked dumb. I sat him down in his hammock and stood looking at him. In a dazed way I felt that this was why he had itched so badly last night; it was the change in his skin. And faintly I seemed to hear again the words spoken at the camp where we met the black Indians:

"In one day they had fever. In three days they turned black. They never can turn light again."

I remembered, too, the things of which I had thought that night when I puzzled about the changed skins. And now, somehow, I knew why this had been done to those men, and why it now was done to White; something which I once had heard about Indians far over in Colombia came back to me. And before I knew I was speaking, I muttered—

"Juana."

He did not hear me, or if he did he gave no sign. He sat hunched over like a man wounded to death, his gaze fixed on his hands. Indians gathered around us, looked, grunted to one another, and went to bring others. I turned and found the *capitán* approaching. He walked calmly in, and I saw that his eyes were hard, as they had been last night. He looked at White's hands, his face, his neck. Then he gave a little nod and turned to walk out.

I stepped in his way, blocking him. Pointing to the blackened man, I demanded:

"*Como? Porqué?* How? Why?"

I knew he understood those Spanish words; but his mouth remained tightly shut, and his eyes turned colder. Sudden anger seized me.

"Answer!" I yelled. "Answer, you dumb fool! Who did this and why?"

I got my answer—I knew it already—but not from him. Into the hut, her face set like her father's, came the girl Juana. She was carrying something. Up to White she walked, and into one of his hands she pushed the thing she held. It was his missing mirror.

In that mirror he stared at the blackened face which always would be his. Suddenly he dashed the glass to the hard dirt, where it smashed. Jumping up, he tore his shirt from his body and looked down at himself. Black to the waist, he was—black as his hands and face.

Lifting his head, he looked into the eyes of Juana.

"You!" he said in a low, blood-chilling tone. "You did this! You put into the red *yucut' 'sehi* the black blood—you poisoned me—like the men of Caño Cerbatana—you made me——"

He choked and clawed at his throat. And though he spoke English, she understood what he meant. And in her short Spanish she answered, her eyes never wavering.

"*Si.* You took me. Then you would go. My father knows. A week he has known. He would kill. But I would not have it. You are my man. You will stay with me. You are no *blanco*. You are *negro*. You can not live with *blancos*. You will live with Maquiritares. You have drunk the Maquiritare *'sehi*. You are black Maquiritare. It is done."

His eyes, like hers, did not move. In them grew a terrible gleam. His face twisted, and stayed twisted. All at once something seemed to snap inside him.

"A nigger!" he screamed. "A squaw man! —— you!"

He struck her in the face. She fell senseless, six feet away.

With a wild laugh he jumped at Juancito. His fist cracked under the chief's ear, and the *capitán* dropped as if shot.

In another instant he was among the Indians, kicking, striking, attacking the whole tribe of Uaunana with his knotted black hands and laughing like a fiend from hell.

Men threw themselves at him, their faces flaming. None had a weapon, but none ran to get one. With hands curved like talons they leaped to claw him, to choke him, to throw and break him. Their Carib blood, usually cool, had suddenly boiled up as they saw their *capitán* fall.

Man after man reeled and sprawled under the blows of those black fists. But other men surged in like maddened peccaries attacking a *tigre*. They yanked him backward, kicked his legs from under him, threw him down and swarmed on him.

It had all happened in a few seconds. Now I did the only thing that could save him. Grabbing my rifle, I fired shot after shot just over their heads. The crash of the gun so near their faces shocked them into a pause. They jumped up and retreated a step or two.

"Stop!" I yelled. "*Es loco*—he is mad! Stand away!"

With that I walked at them. They looked at my big black gun-muzzle, at the man gasping and writhing on the ground—some one had kicked him in the stomach, and he was struggling for breath—and broke away. I stood over him and roared at them.

"Mad!" I repeated. "You made him so. Now you try to kill him because he is what you made him. You are snakes! You are poisoners! Are you murderers too?"

They looked at me—the man known from the Padamo to the Caura as the friend of Maquiritares—and heeded what I said. Some seemed a little ashamed.

"Get to your house!" I commanded. "Your *capitán* is not dead. Take him and throw water on him, and on this woman also. Leave the man to me. Go!"

They went, muttering among themselves. With them they carried Juancito and Juana. Not until they were well away did I take my eyes off them. Then I looked down to find White struggling up.

He was a terrible sight now, scratched and bruised, streaked with blood, smeared with dirt, his breeches torn to tatters through which showed that blackened skin. Worst of all was his face. His bloodshot eyes glared like those of a mad dog; his mouth turned down, and from its corners oozed froth. I felt chilly. But I spoke as calmly as I could.

"Come, *amigo*, and sit and control yourself," I said. "There may be some cure for this. Let us talk. Come!"

I put a hand on his shoulder to lead him to the hammock. It was a mistake. A snarl broke from him. Before I could jump back out of reach he drove a fist with all his power upward at my jaw. I felt that my head was torn from my body. Then I felt nothing more.

A long time later I found myself in my hammock. Men stood around me, watching. One of them was Juancito, his face swollen at one ear.

As I tried to move my head, a sharp pain in my neck wrung a groan from me. Juancito spoke.

"Be still. You are hurt. It is finished."

Raising a hand, I found my neck wrapped in crushed leaves and cotton strips. My chin, too, was bound up. It was sore. Later I found that the flesh there had been split to the bone by that savage blow.

"Finished? Have you killed him?" I demanded.

Another Maquiritare answered.

"No. He is gone. He took his gun and went into the forest."

"And Juana?" I asked.

"She too is gone. She has followed him. Men have gone after her."

I tried to sit up, but the pain was too great. It seemed that the whole top of my head would blow off. My stomach sickened. For minutes I could only grit my teeth and lie still.

When I could talk again I asked:

"That is why men are made black? It is done by women to keep men from leaving them?"

"It is so."

That was what I had thought; for those Colombian Indian women of whom I had heard are said to do the same thing for the same reason, though the drink made there covers the skin with blue patches instead of blackening it all over.

"So Juana, seeing that *el blanco* liked the *'sehi*, put into it the blood of—what?"

"A black dog. A black hen."

"And what else?"

There was no answer. So I felt sure that there was something else. If there was not, why should these people refuse to answer?

"What else?" I persisted. "What is the thing that makes the black skin? The blood of two black creatures, and what?"

The silence continued. At length one said shortly—

"Loco, there are things that no *blanco* may know."

And, *señores*, I do not yet know more than was told that night at my camp below the Caño Cerbatana. As the Uaunanan said, there are things no *blanco* may know. But if you doubt that this can be true, reflect a moment on the fact that the Indians of our Guayana make that marvelous *curare* poison, which paralyzes and kills any creature, yet leaves it meat sweet and harmless for eating. To people who can create such a mixture, what is impossible?

It was two days before I could leave my hammock, and six before I could move my head freely. If it had not been for the care given me by the Maquiritares, who from time to time brought more of those crushed leaves and bound them on, I might not have risen as soon as I did; for that terrible blow under the chin, striking me so suddenly that I could not even set my jaw to receive it, had nearly broken my neck.

As I lay there aching through the long hours and reflected on what I had done for White and considered how he had repaid me for it, I cursed him and myself bitterly more than once. It was the deed of a madman, I kept telling myself; but that did not change the fact that I was in pain, or lessen the feeling that I had been a fool to put myself in the way of such an assault.

As the pain grew easier and my usual strength came back, though, I became more reasonable. And the Maquiritares, now that the man who had injured all of us was gone, held no grudge against me for saving him. Perhaps the fact that I too had suffered at White's hands made them realize that he must truly have been out of his mind, and caused them also to feel more kindly toward me than they otherwise might have done.

At any rate, they tended me faithfully and well, and their *capitán* often lounged for hours beside me in White's abandoned hammock, saying nothing but keeping me silent company.

Then back came the men who had taken the trail of the blackened white and of the girl who had made him what he was. Five of them had gone out, and five only came in. Neither White nor Juana was with them.

They told their tale briefly to Juancito, who sat for a time looking solemnly at the edge of the forest. Then he spoke a few words. The five went to the house and put away their weapons, and the chief walked slowly away by himself, his face giving no sign of his thoughts.

"They have followed Juana and found her," one of the men with me explained in Spanish. "She was with *el blanco*. The white man who now is black takes no rest by day. He goes on and on and does not stop. He seems not to know or care where he goes. She walks behind him.

"When these men tried to come up with her she cried out. The *blanco* turned and shot the gun at them. They covered themselves behind trees. They tried to get around him. But the woman would not have it so. She said they must go back. She said she would stay with her man. If in time her man would come to Uaunana, then her father Juancito would see her again. If not, not."

"And the men came back with no more words?"

"It is so. *El blanco* wears a big belt full of bullets. His gun is strong. His woman will not leave him. So they came back."

"And what says *el capitán?*"

"He says that what has been has been, and what is to be will be."

And that, *señores*, is how the matter was left by all of us. From that time till the day when the *curial* taking me back down the river left Caño Uaunana, not another word of the pair was spoken in my hearing. Neither did I speak of them. There was nothing more to be said.

And as my canoe slid swiftly away down the Ventuari that last morning I looked back once, seeing only the narrow stream rushing smoothly out from the high green forest in which wandered somewhere a man of the North and a girl of the South. And in my mind ran over and over the calm words of Juancito, *capitán* of the Maquiritares of Uaunana—

"What has been has been, and what is to be will be."

XIII

SO, *señores*, that is the tale of Black White; of the man who once, at this table, laughed at a proud white girl and a law thousands of miles away, and who was trapped by a bare brown maiden and branded by the law of the Carib hills.

Because of that black brand, he now roams like a caged *tigre* from end to end and from side to side of that Parima upland which has become his prison, and in which walks no other white man except, at times, Loco León. It is a huge outdoor prison, to be sure—hundreds of miles long and wide—but still a prison; for that blackened skin and the cancered mind it has given him will hold him there forever.

How he lives, what he does, where he goes, are questions which white men may ask but which receive no answer; for the mouths of the Maquiritares, who alone know, are shut. They seem to feel now, those sons of the Caribs, that *El Blanco Negro* is one of the creatures which belong to their Parima and so belong to themselves; and that his life is one of the matters of which no other *blanco* may know. Even I, Loco León, friend of Maquiritares, never can get a word from them about him, except—

"He lives."

Yet I know certain things. I know that the Maquiritares and the Macusi Indians of Guayana Inglesa—British Guiana—are friends, and that they trade back and forth by making overland marches now and then to each other's country. I know some of those men of the Macusi, having met them on their journeys to the Maquiritare *paraguas;* and since they are not Maquiritares, they have no reason to keep Maquiritare secrets unless so minded. And from them I know this:

At times there appears on the river Cuyuni, which flows from our Venezuela into Guayana Inglesa, and on which men hunt gold and diamonds, a small band of Maquiritares. They are not always the same ones, but they bring always the same things: small hide bags and a cartridge shell. The bags hold gold, in dust and nuggets. The men will trade this gold for only one thing—cartridges. And those cartridges must be of the same size as the shell they bring. That size is caliber .30.

They tell no men whence they come, or where they get the gold, or what they do with the cartridges. They take the bullets and go, and that is the end of them. A few men have tried to follow them and find out where the gold comes from, but those men have never come back—except one who floated down the river with his head split. So nobody follows them now. The gold-hunters of the Cuyuni call them "The Thirty Gang."

Now, I know that the Maquiritares have no rifles; their few guns all are long-muzzle-loading shotguns of very weak power, which they get from the Macusi. I know also that the rifles used by us Venezolanos are of caliber .44. But I happen to know that the gun of Black White is a .30.

I know, too, that the girl Juana still is with *El Blanco Negro.* Sometimes in the dry season, when I am scouting for new balata or, having found it, merely rambling about the land of Parima to see whatever I may see, I hear light footfalls in the darkness near some little night camp of mine. And presently out of the night speaks a woman's voice.

"Loco León!" it calls softly. "Loco León!"

"*Quién es?*" I answer, peering into the gloom.

"*Juana de Uaunana,*" says the voice. "*Y El Blanco.*"

The first time I heard this I started to rise from my hammock and step forward. But I was stopped by the click of a rifle-hammer and the hard, strained voice of *El Blanco* himself.

"Sit still!" he commanded. "Don't come near me or I'll shoot. No white man sees me and lives. Talk! Talk English!"

So for some time I sat still and talked English, telling all I could think of about matters outside. At length, though I heard no movement, I felt that I spoke to the empty dark; and when I called his name no answer came.

Since then I have never tried to rise. When that woman's voice comes to me I say:

"*Buen' noche', Juana. Como está uste'?*"

"*Bien,*" she answers. "Well."

Then comes White's harsh order:

"Talk! Talk English!"

And I, who brought him to Uaunana and so to his prison, talk the language of his own land as nearly as I may, and feed his hunger for the white-man words he never can hear from another tongue. And, as on that first night, when he goes it is like an Indian, with no farewell.

Once, and once only, I have spoken of his business, his home, his father, telling him I had heard that inquiry was made about him at Bolívar by the American Minister at Caracas. He stopped me with a bitter curse.

"I'm dead!" he snarled. "Dead! Understand? I died at Salta Para with the rest. I was smashed to jelly and the crocs ate the jelly. Father? ——! The little shrimp needn't worry any more about my disgracing him. I'm dead!"

Then he broke into a laugh that chilled my blood, and I heard that horrible laugh go away in the night and die out at last, leaving me covered with cold sweat. When at length I could speak again I said to the darkness where he had been:

"It is true. You are dead."

And to the world which knew him he is dead for all time. And although he nearly killed me too, that last day at Uaunana, often I have pitied him; for he was no worse than many another man, and much better than some. Yet who shall say that the grim mystery-mountains of the Land of Falling Waters have not measured out justice, and that the red *yucut' 'sehi* of the Maquiritares has not saved many a girl in your North America from tasting a far more bitter cup?

Quiên sabe?

THE BALLAD OF THE *IVANHOE*

by Bill Adams

"WHAT is she making?" asked the mate.
"She's making her sixteen, sir."
"One hundred days to the Golden Gate,"
Said the hard-case mate.
The *Ivanhoe* was running for the open sea.

"What is she making?" asked the skipper.
"She's making her sixteen, sir."
"Two more nights and we'll lose the Dipper,"
Muttered her skipper:
And the *Ivanhoe* was whooping it southerly.

"What's she makin', bullies?" asked Chips.
"Sixteen knots on her course, lad."
"She'll whip them lubberly London ships,"
Grinned carpenter Chips—
And then the Pampero caught her under full sail!

"She's lost one whole storm suit," said Sails.
They fetched new from the locker
And dressed her from boom to spanker brails
For the Cape Horn gales—
And then old *Ivanhoe* ran southing toward the Horn.

"The Ballad of the Ivanhoe," *copyright, 1923, by B. M. Adams.*

"Seen no sun in a month!" growled Bos,'
"A full Horn gale's a-blowin,'
And all of her yards is jammed up close.
My Gawd! *'Ow it snows!"*
Old *Ivanhoe* had been a full four weeks off Stiff.

"Where's the skipper?" the froze mate said.
"I haven't seen him of late."
"He's overboard, and he's drowned and dead."
And, shaking his head,
"You'll have to sail her to Frisco," said the second.

Six men lay dead. Calm came in spells.
The second mate went crazy.
Old *Ivanhoe* lifted to the swells,
Clanging both her bells;
Her wreckage trailed astern amidst the Cape Horn bergs.

"What is she making?" asked the mate.
"Just creeping at two knots, sir."
"Three hundred days to the Golden Gate,"
Grinned her hard-case mate—
When a fair wind blew after eight weeks off Cape Stiff.

"Will we sail in to Vallapo
For refittin?" asked the hands.
"No, sons! *Not by one hell of a show!*
We will take her so,
Just as she is, to Frisco," said her hard-case mate.

"A steamer's comin' through the swell,
Offerin' us assistance."
"Signal the lubber to go to hell!
Signal him, "*'All's well.'* "
Old Ivanhoe *had been two hundred days at sea.*

"What's come of that old *Ivanhoe?"*
Asked one of the clerks at Lloyd's.
"Perished maybe, in a Cape Horn blow,
There's none to know."
And then they slowly tolled the bell for her at Lloyd's.

Jury rigged, with all her freight,
And the red rust on her sides,
Came old *Ivanhoe,* a twelvemonth late
With her hard-case mate,
And half her crew, slow stealing through the Golden Gate.

Back to the Soil

by H. S. Cooper

Author of "Atmosphere"

NOSSIR (said Charlie), I make no more tries to get closer to Nature, to get back to the soil on my own hook. Me, I'm satisfied to cut hay for the old man and let him wrastle with the nesters and the tax-collector. This land-hunger business sometimes leads a single man into trouble; first thing he knows there's a mortgage on *him* instead of—and maybe in addition to—one on the land. I sure had a narrow escape along that same line not so dreadful long ago and I'm still land-shy!

It all hatched out of that reward money I got for capturing that Mex bandit, fifteen hundred good, round simoleons, more mazuma than I'd ever owned at one time. And I had a fine program prepared for the "diminution of that wealth" as Mustard used to say every pay-day and I reckon I'd have missed some valuable experience in real estate and other things—including square chins—if I'd been allowed to follow out that program!

But Old Lady Fate she steps in and says different, she sure is a great hand at butting in where she isn't wanted! First-off she comes in the disguise of the old man himself and preached a whole lot to me about investing that money in cattle and letting them roll up like a snowball and be a support and a consolation and a comfort in my old age. Shucks! That didn't make any impression on me at all, old age was a long way off from your Uncle Charlie, and that fifteen hundred was right there and fairly splitting itself wide open with promises of good times! Besides that, I know the way of cattle, I've seen them do the other end of that snowball act—just melt clean away and leave nothing but a damp spot!

So, I did the burro act, and kicked out every time the old man opened his mouth on the subject of cattle and finally he got tired, cussed me out and left me alone and Mrs. Fate she had to hunt another medium. She got wise—discarded pants, chin-whiskers and chewing-tobacco and here come Ma Stuart tackling me to let her have the money and invest it for me and the first thing I knew I was thrown, hog-tied and Ma Stuart had all that money except a hundred I wheedled out of her. It sure was a dirty trick of Old Lady Fate to sic her on to me!

Well, things went on as usual for a time, I'd near forgotten that money when there comes a cousin from North Carolina to visit the family. I reckon Ma Stuart told him about my money and my overpowering and consuming desire to invest it for the benefit of my old age when I wouldn't enjoy it even if I was alive, for the first news, I knew was that she had me in to see the cousin about a bargain in real estate that he had and which would just about fit my pile. He was a trustee for some estate in North Carolina and among the stuff was a piece of land, off by itself, as was a bargain, a hundred or two acres up in the hill country, good stone house and barn, running water from a spring up above the house,

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"*Back to the Soil,*" *copyright, 1923, by H. S. Cooper.*

some good timber—etcetery and so forth—a regular real-estater's pipe-dream!

Now, I'm not saying that it didn't interest me, for it did! It was August in Arizona, I hadn't seen an acre of real trees, nor a clear spring, nor a stream running real water, for so long that I was just pining for them and that description surely made my mouth water. Still it's always up to us capitalists to be cautious about our investments and I says—

"Well, what's the compensating disadvantages?"

I'd learned them words from Mustard and the cousin he gasps when they reach him! He caught his breath and says:

"I'm told there's a squatter on the land and they can't get him off unless they buy him off and the heirs won't agree to that. From what I've been told lately a real determined man could get him off and it would pay him to do it. The place is worth two thousand dollars, as land is up there, and I'm authorized to take fifteen hundred for it and let part of it go on mortgage."

Right here Old Lady Fate prods Ma Stuart in the back and she says:

"Why don't you go out and look at it, Charlie, I'll get Pop to let you off for two-three weeks and you can go out and size it up. If you don't buy, you'll have a nice trip and if you do buy you'll have a good nest-egg for your old age."

There it went again, about my "old age," and I felt real muley, right off! But that Fate lady surely knows the game, she gave Ma another poke and she says—

"And, besides that, I know you could chase that squatter!"

It shows that mortal man is e't up by vanity! All that talk about nest-eggs and investments didn't interest me a little bit but when Ma Stuart came that over me about my being able to oust that squatter, I just fell for it, swelled right up and two days after I hiked out for North Carolina.

The station I got off at was way up on some little ever-so-seldom railroad in the hills and the ranch was some six or eight miles away, which pleased me mightily as I certainly do hate to have a lot of stinking, noisy locomotives scooting and kihooting through the back-lot, killing stock, setting fire to the grass and bringing in hoboes and tourists and such. The station was the county seat and there was a little stone courthouse and calaboose, a store or two, a thing which called itself a hotel, more lawyer's officers than you could shake a stick at and not a saloon, a dance-hall nor a gambling-joint! Think of that for a live county seat, will you!

I asked the depot-agent a question or two and lo, I had struck a pay-streak! My aunt! He was the whole outfit outside of the lawyers and a few county officers. He ran the depot, the express office, the biggest store, the livery stable and the hotel. He was coroner, justice of the peace, notary public, deputy-sheriff, mayor, constable—and goodness only knows what else in the town and county. Also he was some high-muckamuck in the Masons or Odd Fellows or something, he was some man in the Red Men, Woodmen, Freemen and a lot of other men, and he was also Cock-of-the-Roost in a regular menagerie of Elks, Mooses, Owls, Eagles and other fraternal critters besides being something in a lot of other societies which didn't have anything but initials.

And he certainly loved to tell about himself. There was only one train a day each way, business in the hotel and the store was slack, the orders, animals and initials didn't meet until night and here the Lord had sent him a healthy looking listener—and he sure could talk! I had to gaze on him in much admiration, he wasn't but little over five feet high, had a wall-eye and an impediment in his walk—and him all them things he had told me about. I told Ma Stuart about him after I got back—expecting her to laugh—and what do you think she said?

"Well, Charlie, it just shows what a person can do if they only try!"

Say, a woman's funny-bone is a curious thing, isn't it?

Finally, I got a chance to get a word in edgewise, I asked him about the "Archer place" as the cousin had called it, and he dropped all his titles and businesses and occupations and offices and became one curious human being right away.

"Are you aiming to buy that place?"

"I certainly am if it pleases me and looks like a good investment."

"Fine place all right but there's an impediment to immediate possession and I could put you into just as good a place for about the same money and give immediate possession. I didn't mention it, but I'm the leading real-estate man here."

" 'Impediments to immediate possession'

means squatters, in North Carolina, doesn't it?" I asks, and he grins and says:

"I see you know about it. Well, in this case it sure means an impediment!"

"Well," I says, "it may mean that among you Tar Heels but out in Arizona, where I come from, it's liable to mean that the squatter'll confine his squatting to a piece of land about seven feet by three—if the digging ain't too hard!"

"That's been tried—and by others than Tar Heels—and the results has always been the same. So far there's been no need for anything but a doctor to pick out rock-salt and white beans and sew up dog-bites but B. G. has sent out word that if this foolishness don't stop there'll be call for my services as coroner and undertaker—I didn't tell you, but I'm the leading undertaker here."

"Who's 'B. G.?' "

"B. G. White—the squatter—at least that is *his* initials, but——"

But I breaks in sort of brash and says—

"What's his height and weight?" He looks at me sort of flabber-gasted and says—

"Whose?"

"Why him, this White person!"

He still looks at me in a queer sort of way and stammers out:

"Oh—*him?* Oh, yes! His height—yes! And his weight—yes! Why, of course, his height—say a hundred and twenty, and his weight—why, yes, his weight—well, not much over a hundred and twenty-five—I mean not over five foot three or four."

I ought to have paid more attention to that speech, I sure oughter! If ever a man was bowled over, that little *multum in parvo* was and if I hadn't been so stuck on myself about being able to oust that squatter, where every one else had failed, I'd have tumbled to the fact that there was something wrong—and have made more palaver. But, I just took it as he was sort of in cohoots or something with the squatter—probably the man bought at his store—and didn't like the idea of any one un-squatting him. So I says:

"Well, in your professional capacity, you get a nice coffin ready for about them dimensions you've named and if the squatter or his folks can't pay for it, I'll do it for him! How do I get out to the place?"

"Well, my buggy-rig is out—can you ride?" and he looks sort of dubersome at my high-heeled boots.

"A little!" I answers, some sarcastic.

"The reason I ask is that the only riding horse I got is pretty skittish!"

Just think of that, will you! Only one riding hoss!

Well, we went to look at that and, say, you ought to have seen it! Just about like that old gray we used to keep on the ranch for these visitors to practice on. The saddle was just about the size of the palm of your hand and didn't have any pommel or cantle on it and there was one of these wicked snaffle-bits over the bridle. The old critter sort of pranced out a bit and when I hit him a clip with the reins he made a motion as if he'd like to r'ar up a bit—and that was all. And the little man says—just as solemn and earnest as you please:

"You certainly can ride. Most folks as comes here likes them quieter!"

Then he give me the directions as to the roads and says:

"You can ride right up to the door—if it's daylight. And you'll get invited right in and have as fine a meal as you ever tasted—and no questions asked. It'll be for you to open the matter."

That sounded sort of funny and I says—

"Well—and after that?"

"Why, you'll get one of the surprizes of your life—if you *are* from Arizona! And that reminds me; what's your home town and your nearest relative's name? I'll have to ship the remains, being as I'm the express agent!"

FOR answer, I rode off. I looked back after a minute and that little monopolist was having a duck-fit all by his lonesome, just ha-ha-ing and slapping his legs and I come mighty near turning back and making some inquiries as to the why and wherefore of it all—but I didn't. After that dig I gave him about the Tar Heels—him being a native North Carolinian—he had something coming to him and besides what could I have done? Outside of his being smaller than me and some puny, it's one thing to fight one man and it's another to try to lick the whole official, professional and mercantile population of a town! So I ambled on.

It sure was a pretty country, the cousin hadn't lied about that. Nice little rolling hills all covered with big trees, real trees—not these dod-gasted cotton-woods. A clear little spring-fed stream running in every hollow, birds a-singing, squirrels and rabbits and quail dodging around most every corner, the air as cool and clear as the water—it sure was a pretty ride! After a while, rising a little hill and a turn in the road and there was the place right at me. The cousin had pictured it pretty truthful, all but as to the squatter! I stopped the old nag and sat there quite a while and thought. I pictured to myself me—your Uncle Charlie—owning it—*owning* it, you know—me that had never owned much more than my horse-outfit and the clothes on my back, me being boss and chief cook and head-wrangler over that little ranch!

Lordy! I'll never have the pure pleasure of those minutes over again, not if I live to be a hundred and own half the country. I don't wonder that men get what they call "land-hunger" if they get as much pleasure out of it as I did out of thinking about that little place being mine and it not one-tenth as big as our small pasture! Well, I just sat there the longest time and I can't tell half the fool things I thought up about that little house and lot and what'd make a home out of it for me! Then I woke up out of the pipe-dream and rode up to the door—and I rode plum careful and my fingers were handy to my gun even after I'd knocked.

A small, good-looking woman, with the brightest eyes and the squarest chin I ever saw, opened the door and I took off my hat and said:

"Good evening, ma'am. Is Mr. White in? I'd like to see him if he is."

She looked at me sort of inquiring and funny.

"Who did you say?"

"Mr. B. G. White."

I came near adding "the squatter," for the idea of there being any women folks in it sort of flustered me, I'd thought all along that I'd meet some great big double-fisted mountaineer sort of thing and we'd have it good and strong after dinner. When I said "Mr. B. G. White" her eyes just struck sparks for a minute and she looked still queerer and then she smiles and says:

"No, he isn't around just at this minute, probably he'll be quite late getting in. 'Light and put up your horse in the barn and come in and wait. Supper'll be ready soon and you've probably got an appetite riding from the depot," for she'd spotted that depot-hoss.

Well, I put up the hoss and strolled back to the house. Nice looking place it was too, looked sort of homeyfied and the lady was at the door to meet me—and welcome me with them rifle-eyes of hers just a-glittering! It reminded of the times I've had to look into the muzzles of two guns at once and I didn't like the way those eyes kept a bead on me, no, not one little bit I didn't! I sensed trouble right then, I felt it in my bones. But what was a poor, lone man to do? Here was a nice hospitable appearing lady a-welcoming me in and the finest smell of cooking that ever came out of a doorway just insisting that I come in and sample the goods—so in I went.

Inside it was just one big room with small rooms branching off it. This room was kitchen, dining-room and sitting-room, it had a great big open fire-place and by it dishing up the supper was a girl—*some* girl, let me tell you, when she straightened up, tall, big, handsome, soople as a cat and eyes and chin a duplicate of her mother's. She nodded at me when I introduced myself by name to both of 'em and we sat down to eat and it sure was some meal! Man! I never set my teeth into anything like it. I just couldn't tell you all there was nor what it was, but it was fine! It was so good it set me talking, you know I ain't much on the chin-music with women in general—what in blazes are you chuckling at, you know I ain't—but I sure gave them Arizona and your Uncle Charlie for fair! And there they sat a-listening and saying nothing and just boring into me with them rifle-eyes.

Well, after I'd talked a heap, those eyes and the silence outside of me sort of got on my nerves, I looked at my watch and it was near nine o'clock so I says:

"Ain't it most time for Mr. White to be getting here?"

They shot a quick look at each other and the lady says:

"I reckon he won't be here tonight, he's probably got night-bound somewhere, he's been on a powerful long trip and there wasn't no sure certainty of his being home tonight anyway. So you'd better let us put you up for the night, there's the spare room all ready, and see if Mr. White gets home in the morning. You'd surely get lost trying to get back to the depot in the dark."

Well, that listened good to me, a breakfast in the same class as that supper and a daylight chance to look at the girl and chat a bit with her seemed too good a thing to lose.

So I cinched the idea in my most perlite manner and then the lady says:

"Do you ever take a nightcap before you retire? I can't give you any liquor but I have some fine wine of my own making and I'd like to have you sample it. I'll guarantee that it will make you sleep well!"

Lordy, Lordy, boy! How them two must have chuckled inside when she said those last words—but I'm ahead of my story. I can't say that I admired the idea of that drink when she told me what it was, I most generally fight shy of women's drinks. They like them sweet and smelly with fruit and other messes in them like some of this stuff they drink in the big cities. And the drink that she brought out was all of that, half a tumbler-ful! It was not only sweet and smelly but it had a sort of bitter after-taste that most gagged me, but I downed it like a little man, praised it up and down and the lady showed me to my room, a nice, comfy little box off the big room; fine bed, clean, sweet-smelling sheets and the fair smell of them made me sleepy and it wasn't five minutes before I was pounding my ear to beat the band.

NEXT thing I knew the sun was shining in my eyes and I woke up to the worst taste in my mouth that I'd ever sampled! The prevailing color seemed to be a rusty-brown but it had purple streaks in it and when I went to turn my head something heavy rolled around inside it and ached like blazes. However, I just had to get up, that White man might come any minute, so I chucked off the bed-clothes, got out on the side of the bed and then dived under the bed-clothes mighty sudden again. Why? Well, setting right on a chair beside the bed, where I had put my own clothes last night was a chair-ful of women's clothes and not a stitch of mine in sight!

I laid and listened for the longest while and didn't hear a sound, then I coughed and coughed and coughed, still nothing doing. Then I spoke softly, "Lady, Lady!" but not a sound. Then I let out that "Lady" louder and louder until I nearly stove the roof off and no sound but the barking of a dog that sounded as if a lion was practising barking. So, I dug out of the bed-clothes and proceeded to investigate.

First, as to my clothes, not a sign of 'em! I'd slept in undershirt and drawers and that's all I had, just what was on me. So, I made an investigation through the crack of the door and as there didn't seem to be any one there I ambled out into the big room. All deserted, but on the table was a piece of paper directed to "Uncle Charlie," and this is what it said:

> In case you want to dress up you'll find clothes on the chair beside the bed, make yourself welcome to them. Don't waste time hunting for men's clothes, you won't find any. There is food a'plenty in the meat-safe, help yourself. Also, there's a bottle of that same wine on the top-shelf if you want an eye-opener. Daughter and I will be home before dark, wait for us. BERTHA G. WHITE.
>
> P.S.—Don't hurt little Trusty.

Well—oh, it ain't any good, this distance off, to try to describe what I thought—and said! No, sirs! Not unless you've been in a like fix you wouldn't appreciate my feelings. *Done!* Done brown and basted like a roasting turkey and all by a woman and a girl! Oh, Lordy, even now I get goose-bumps on me when I think of it!

Then I got mad and rampaged all over that house and in every box and cupboard and trunk in it, but I might have known! A woman with eyes and a chin like that don't overlook any bets, so I read the letter over again to see if it would give me a clue and this time I saw that postscript, "Don't hurt little Trusty," and I wondered who little Trusty was—and I soon found out.

Having exhausted all the hiding-places in the house I made up my mind that I'd hunt around outside and if any one was around and saw my decolletty costoom it'd be up to them to look away or let it go. So, I opened the back door—and closed it sudden, for little Trusty was there to welcome me! Who was Trusty? Well "little" Trusty was a cross between a wolf and a lion all in a dog's skin! Man! I never saw such a dog, as big as a burro with the wickedest eye and the finest dental display you ever saw. And active! And evidently acting under strict orders from White & Co., not to let me get out in the air and catch cold.

I tiptoed over to the front door and Trusty was there, just daring me to set my foot outside. I looked out of the window and the dare was repeated—a sort of "double-dare" as the boys say. So I sat down and let my feelings sort of calm while I did some thinking. First off I had to get rid of Trusty and there wasn't a weapon in the house, my guns had left along with my pants. So I took another hunt and look around the house and I found a sort of loft over one end of the big room, with a little window looking out of it, a sort of a storage place for all sorts of odds and ends and in it was a big coil of clothes-line—and I surely whooped when I saw it!

I got it down, cut off what I wanted, lissomed it up with some tallow I found in the meat-safe, rove a good, free-running honda in one end, tried it across the big room and it worked like a charm. Then I climbed up on to that platform, looked out of the window and little Trusty was there to greet me with his welcoming roar. I called him all the things I'd like to have called White & Co., and it just seemed to amuse him, so I climbed down again, gathered all the pots and pans I could carry, took them up on the platform and bombarded him with them, and, in trying to dodge a dish-pan he ran into a skillet and got a bump on the head that just made him crazy—just where I wanted him.

He had been acting on orders before that but now he was personally interested and mad clear through. So I got out the rope and flicked him a few times with the loose end and he just stood up on his hind legs and snapped for it. Then I reversed the rope and dropped the loop over him and had him, forepaws and neck, just helpless, couldn't bite it, couldn't shake it off—so I hauled him up until he stood on his tip-toes, took a hitch of the rope on a hook by the window, climbed down, cut off some more rope and went out to tie up little Trusty.

I went careful at first but I didn't need to worry, Trusty's little paws had pressed pretty hard on his throat and he was short of wind. If ever I did a good job of tying I sure did it on that critter, I wasn't taking any chances with him and when I got done with him he was one safe little dog, the only things he could move was his eyes and his tail. Lordy, but he looked murder at me out of his eyes but as he had a good sized chunk of wood between his jaws he had to take it out in looking!

I found a pair of man's old boots out in the barn and that was all I did find in the way of gent's clothing, the depot hoss was gone and I never did find out where they'd cached my clothes and stuff. But I just *had* to make a getaway before them women got back and it was way past noon by now: my searching and my little play-games with Trusty had used up a lot of time.

I had found some blankets in the house in my search and there were butcher-knives in the dish-closet so with the help of these I carved one of the blankets into something that remotely resembled breeches and then I carved another one into a poncho—a hole for my head and one for each arm and I let it fall graceful back and front and cinched it and the breeches with the clothes-line looped through them. Then I attacked that meat-safe, for my hide-and-seek game had made me hungry and chased my headache. I had found a hatchet out at the wood-pile, I cut me a good club with it out of a tree near the house, stuck the hatchet into the clothes-line belt and behold a cross between Robinson Crusoe and the Wild-Man-of-the-Woods, starting for the depot.

I sure hated to do it, I could just hear that little tike at the depot have the laugh on me and Arizona, I did not have a cent outside of what was in my pants and them Lord knows where, I did not know how about that hoss—I didn't know or care anything except to get away from those women and what they wanted to do to me, for I had a sort of a notion as to the state of the case, from their point of view. So I ambled off back toward the depot and I surely must have been a sight!

Thank my luck for this much—that there did not any one live near the road and no one seemed to be traveling. The old shoes hurt my feet a bit but I'd soak them in every little stream I'd come to and I got on fine, the blanket-pants sort of flopped in one another's way and I had to walk kind of bow-legged but I made progress.

I'd gone some four or five miles when, all of a sudden I heard Trusty's little roaring-bark behind me and I didn't waste any time listening to it! I just hunted me a good big tree with low-growing limbs, got up into it on one of these limbs and I took up brother club and sister hatchet and fixed them ready for use for I'd made up my mind that this time I was going to disobey the boss's orders: I *was* going to hurt little Trusty, if he came near enough. But Trusty had one experience with your Uncle Charlie and he did not seem eager to come close. He made sure I was in the tree and then he sat down a clothes-line's length away and called me back all the names I had flung at him in the morning, and also some more that I hadn't thought of at the time.

Pretty soon I heard hoss's hoofs and here come White & Co., leading that depot animal with all my clothes and things tightly strapped on him in a bundle—and them women could ride, if anybody asks you, and side-saddle on a man's saddle at that! They rode up close and said something to little Trusty and he called me one last, long, fighting name and went off home with his tail between his legs, I'll bet he'd had some full experience with them square chins!

Then they drew up close to me and got a good look at the new kind of animal perched on the limb and they commenced to laugh. First I got mad and sulky but that didn't feaze 'em, they just laughed the more. Then it struck me that I must look sort of funny perched there trying to do the wounded dignity act and so I had to laugh too and we had quite a merry time for a minute. Then the girl rode up closer and made her speech and I stopped laughing pronto! Says she:

"Mr. Charlie, Mom and me talked you over last night and we come to a conclusion. We're tired of this squatting business, Pop started it on account of a sort of feud he had with old man Archer, he was Pop's first cousin and I reckon we'd have tired out the heirs in time and got the place for little or nothing. But we're tired of it and of folks coming here to oust us and all that stuff and having to fool 'em or scare 'em, I been for never giving in but Mom she talked last night and says as how some o' these folks may take it to court and then we'll get licked, and why not make a sort of compromise with the Archer trustee.

"We have a few hundred dollars saved, we been to see another cousin of ours this morning and he'll lend us as much more, from your talk you've got some money, why can't we club together and buy the place and settle down on it and live here, its a good place, it'll make a good living for us and we can get it for a whole lot less'n its value. So, this is to say that if you was willing, why I'd be willing also to marry you right soon and settle down at once!"

I DON'T know what I'd have said if I'd had a chance to talk—I sure don't! Like enough I'd have had to say "Yes" but, as it was, Providence and that depot horse intervened. She'd let loose of the horse and he'd been grazing round until, at that minute, he was right under me. I'd been sitting side-saddle on the limb hanging on to a twig while she was talking and the longer she talked the more suspicious I got of what was coming and yet, when she said "marry" it hit me just like a shot, I had one of these drowning visions that a fellow sees when he goes under water for the last time—only my vision wasn't of my past life, it was of my future with them two square chins—mother-in-law and wife.

Mebbe, on second thoughts, and perched on that limb for a while longer, I might have got over the shock but with that depot hoss right under me at the time, I took a chance at life and liberty—I slid off that limb onto the old nag's back, hit him a clip with the club and all that I did for a mile or so was to hold on—there sure was some spirit left in that old hide!

After he got a bit tired I took him in hand, we adjourned up one of the little streams and there I took a bath, disrobed from my Injun finery, put on my clothes—and they surely did feel good again—and about dark your Uncle Charlie might have been seen riding into the town, clothed, in his right mind and with all his plunder—for those women had packed every mortal thing into that bundle, not a thing missing.

I had to stay all night at the hotel and the proprietor was some curious cuss about my visit, and the questions he asks made some things clear to my mind. Says he, first off:

"Well, I see you're back and don't seem to need my services as undertaker. How did you like B. G.?"

"One of the finest women I ever saw, hospitable, reasonable and nice, just willing to do anything I'd suggest and that fine young lady daughter of hers is the same way, mighty sweet women both on'em!"

That sort of choked him off for a second but he come back.

"Did you happen to see their dog?"

"What, little Trusty? Yes, we was friends right off, I've got a way with dogs that always fetches them. He sort of reminded me of one of my own dogs only he's smaller by a lot and my dog is fierce!"

He chewed at that for a minute and then he says—

"Had a fine feed didn't you?"

"One of the finest suppers I ever sat

down to and the breakfast this morning beat even that!"

"Did you get any of her home-made wine?"

"I'll say I did. Fine stuff! I must have drank a pint or so of it— and I wish as I'd asked her to give me a bottle of it to take to Arizona, we don't have no drinks like that there, the real grape-juice with such a nice flavor to it!"

That held him for quite a while. Then—

"You ain't going to buy the place then?"

"I don't aim to buy no place where there's so much loose water running around and so many trees to shut off the view! Me for a country where you can stand and look around you and see yesterday and tomorrow as well as today! Me for Arizona tomorrow morning!"

That settled him so far as asking questions was concerned but he certainly was some puzzled. Me praising the ladies, saying that they'd do anything I'd want 'em to, me being pals with little Trusty, me liking that doped wine and not showing no effects of it—I reckon as I was about the only hombre as had ever run up against White & Co., in the dispossessing line and come away pleased with the result and not showing some effects! It stumped him!

When I went to take the train the next morning he was there and I'd catch him gazing at me and the last thing I saw as the train started was him gazing after me in a sort of wondering way—and I'll bet something that he never got anything different out of White & Co.!

I had to tell a different tale to Ma Stuart but I had plenty of time to make up a good one—I forget what it was, right now. But I sure had a bad time getting that six hundred dollars out of her after that!

What six hundred?

Just like me, shooting off my fool mouth! Darn your hides, if you ever let on about this, 'specially to Ma Stuart, I'll take the hides off the whole kit and kaboodle of you! Why, you see, I got thinking of them two women fighting along for themselves and every one against them, and me with a lot of money as wasn't doing me a bit of good and wasn't like to, so I wormed six hundred dollars out of Ma Stuart, just told her I had to have it and no questions asked and she gave it to me mighty unwilling. I turned it over to the cousin on the q. t. and says:

"You slip that to those squatter-women as soon as you get back, just tell 'em it's pay for a fine supper with drinks attached and let it go at that." And I says, "If you ever open your mouth to any one about it you and me will have it sure!"

He didn't exactly tell, but one day Ma Stuart says to me:

"Cousin Simon writes me that those squatters have bought that Archer place, compromised with him for twelve hundred dollars. How do you suppose they got that much money?" and she looks at me mighty suspicious.

"Well," I says, "I reckon as they must have sold Trusty to a circus, he'd make a powerful understudy for the lions! I guess that a menagerie-man would give good money for Trusty—if he saw him first!"

And with that I saunters away and I don't bring it up any more. But she don't let me have any more of that money no matter how hard I hint—it don't make no difference anyway, I might buy up a hundred-thousand acre ranch and not feel as I did when I topped that hill and saw that little place— If it hadn't been for them eyes and chins——

CHARLIE lapsed into silence, for he was, at heart, a family man of good domestic habits—but hopelessly gone astray through environment.

Jungle Eyes

by Frederick Moore

Author of "The Butterfly Hunter," "Shipwrecked," etc.

IT WAS a beautiful morning on the tropical island of Caratan. Three men sat at breakfast on the veranda of the big bamboo bungalow which overlooked the palm groves below, the sandy flats and the shining beach, where the feathery white combers curled with a gentle roar.

One of these men, John Blount, owned the island and its profitable plantations. He had every reason in the world for being happy and contented—and he was both—yet as he sipped his coffee, he casually spoke the words which were his own death warrant. He said—

"I'm going to cable my son to come."

Whitman, the superintendent, turned his eyes slowly to Ewing, the book-keeper, and looked a warning. The lids of Ewing's eyes dropped, and he picked up a knife and cut the fruit on the plate before him, an action which indicated that he would leave the entire matter in the hands of the superintendent.

"You mean, sir, that you intend to have George come back from the United States—to stay?" inquired Whitman.

"Exactly," said Blount. "He'll inherit the business, and he might as well learn to run it under my direction."

"Oh, yes, of course," agreed Whitman. "But you've got twenty years yet—twenty years of active life ahead of you. I hope, sir, you're not beginning to feel your age."

"I'm old enough," said the old man. "But it will take George twenty years to learn what he needs to know if he's to take my place, and make the business pay."

"But his education, sir? Do you mean he is to give up the university?"

Blount sighed.

"If I'd had a university education, I'd probably have known too much to attempt what I did here—and wouldn't have had to make the struggle I did. I was the fool who rushed in, took my life in my hands with a lot of savages, and when I came out a winner, everybody said I was a wonder. Why, Whitman, the first ten years I was here, every day that I kept my head on my shoulders was a triumph. And I was so poor that I went around for five months in a pair of pants that I wouldn't let one of my house-boys wear now. And George has been away a long time—and thinks everything is as safe as a church at home. Well, I know, and you know, that he has a lot to learn about how the money is made here—and should know a lot about the natives of Caratan."

Ewing went on eating his fruit, his eyes downcast, but there was a little look of worriment about the corners of his mouth—and he had turned slightly pale.

"I quite agree," went on Whitman. "But to give up the university—why, from what I've heard you say, he's not over anxious

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"Jungle Eyes," copyright, 1923, by Frederick Moore.

to come to Caratan—to give up his education——"

"Education!" snorted Blount. "Education in—poker and horse-racing and so on! He's learning a lot of things he won't need to know to run Caratan—and missing a lot he should know. There's a big poker game here for him to get into—and his head is the jack-pot. He's had enough education of the civilized kind. I've had too many cables for bank credits lately—gambling debts. My mind is made up. Before I die I want to teach George the trick of keeping a kris out of his back.

"When does the cutter come by for the mail?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, sir," said Whitman. "There's time enough to write the cable, sir. You said yesterday that you'd like to try for a shot at a wild pig some morning. Shall we go into the hills—now?"

"All right," said Blount, and reaching for a cigaret, he rose from the table.

He was a sturdy old man, for all his appearance of withered frailty. His white hair fell about his ears in longish curls, his wrinkled face was burned by a tropical sun to the hue of sun-baked leather, and his cheeks were sunken. His thin jaws still retained their angles of forcefulness, and his gray eyes had in them some of the old fire they had brought to Caratan forty years before, when the island was only a pirate-infested jungle. He had turned it into a garden, and had half-conquered, half-cajoled the natives into a civilization which was carefully balanced to what they could appreciate.

He walked with vigorous step to the end of the veranda, his white duck coat slack about his slightly bent shoulders. On each side, the polished pockets of pistol-holsters showed beneath the lapels of his coat. He looked out over the smooth sea, and bent his head to inhale the odors of blossoming creepers that ran riot over the stanchions of the veranda. Presently he moved away, and Whitman and Ewing heard his footfalls fade away toward the back of the building.

"——!" whispered Ewing, his face really white now with fear. "What put that idea into his head? Now we *are* in for it!"

He was a young man, with a furtive eye that had the knack of steady frankness in it when the occasion required. There was the languor of elegance about him, though he could also suggest efficient briskness; he seemed to be interested in nothing, yet when he appeared most careless of what was going on about him, he was listening and observing with a shrewdness that would have startled those about him if they could have known the deviousness of his mind. In short, Arthur Ewing had mastered the modern art of concealing his own personality, and presenting one which held the confidence of those with whom he dealt. Tall, slender, clean-shaven, and wearing well-tailored white clothes, he made a striking contrast to the other two men—the sun-burned owner, and the rather roughly-clad superintendent.

"You keep still," said Whitman quietly. "I'll attend to the business."

As the Chinese servant came out to clear the table, Whitman held up a hand of warning, and followed his employer around the corner of the veranda.

The superintendent was a man of middle age, mild in manner but more subtle-minded than his studied uncouthness would lead a casual observer to suppose. There was a certain rotundity about his face, and a healthiness, which gave him the aspect of a man new to the tropics, though he had had a varied, and shady, career, long before he had joined Blount's plantation as superintendent some two years previously. He had rumpled black hair, brown eyes that had a kind of fishiness in their gaze, and a stubby black mustache. He wore boots with soiled, white canvas trousers tucked into their tops, a heavy belt that was crinkled with tiny leather slots for cartridges, and wore a white silk shirt that was slightly open at the neck.

He had Ewing completely under his thumb, having trapped the young man a year back, in a piece of "careless" bookkeeping, but he refrained from making a report, because Ewing had fathomed some of Whitman's private dealing which was against the interests of the owner of Caratan. And for several months they had been working out a plan to defraud the old man of substantial assets, which, working together, they had accumulated in a bank in Singapore. They were already arranging to get that money into their hands by a series of crafty manipulations. They wanted plenty of time, so the announcement that Blount's son was to be called home to Caratan, created a panic for them. They were so deeply involved that there was no turning back, and not having met, and having no knowledge of the abilities of George Blount, they dreaded his coming. It could only mean that he would begin to take a hand in the business—and that would mean for them a speedy disaster.

"Piatu! Piatu!"

It was Whitman, on the other side of the house, calling for the gun-bearer who always accompanied Blount on his trips into the hills in search of game.

In a few minutes Whitman appeared again, this time with a rifle in his hands. At sight of him, Ewing, who had remained sitting in his chair at the breakfast-table, shivered, and putting a wavering hand up to his eyes, disappeared into the house. But he was behind a *kajang*, watching, when Blount, wearing yellow oil-skin breeches over his white trousers—the jungle would still be damp—sauntered out of the house with a rifle and handed it to Piatu, the Malay hunter.

Whitman, leading the way, crossed the clearing to a trail that led into the hills, followed by Blount and the gun-bearer.

* * *

NOW they were in a dark and gloomy vista, and no longer could see the beach of the island, nor the brown roofs of the settlement strung along the palm-rimmed shore. The vine-hung trail was narrow, but Whitman managed to allow Blount to take the lead.

"You'll get a shot at any time now, sir," said the superintendent. "The pigs range across the close underbrush from the old hill *padi*—it was in here that I saw one yesterday."

They proceeded, climbing higher, Blount in the lead, Piatu at his heels, and Whitman bringing up the rear.

In half an hour or more, they entered an open space, crossed it, and went into a close-hung bower, which was so narrow that Blount had to press his way through the opening. Whitman pressed in after Piatu, and making sure that they were all concealed from the clearing, the superintendent pushed his way to one side—so that the Malay would not be directly between him and Blount—raised his rifle and fired.

The old man bent backward, gave a gurgling cry of pain and surprize, and then pitched forward on his face into the tangle of underbrush.

Piatu swung round in astonishment, and faced the muzzle of Whitman's rifle. There was blank amazement on the native's face, a sudden comprehension which turned his look to terror, and his mouth opened as if he were about to cry an alarm—but a bullet got him between the eyes, and he reeled backward and crumpled into the heavy leaves that draped the trail.

Whitman picked up the rifle the Malay had been carrying, fired it into the air, and dropped it. Then he went on to where Blount lay still, and took a pistol from the belt of the prone figure, and again fired into the air. Then he threw the weapon a few feet ahead of the dead man, so that it would appear to have swung from his grasp as he fell.

Without further ado, the superintendent turned and went back into the clearing. He stood for awhile, listening, and looking about, as if to make sure that no one had been within sight of the murders from that end of the covered trail. He called out "Hello!" and, getting no response, he made for the path which led back to the settlement.

When he broke from the jungled path, in sight of the big plantation house, he began to run, calling excitedly:

"Ewing! Ewing! Nilam! Nilam!"

Ewing appeared on the veranda, and behind him the turbanned figure of old Nilam, who was the native advisor of Blount, and acted for him in all matters that concerned the control and employment of the natives of Caratan.

"What's wrong?" called Ewing weakly.

Whitman waved his hat wildly, and yelled:

"Piatu has murdered Mr. Blount! And then I shot Piatu when he turned on me! It was the shooting a few minutes back—they're both dead up on the pig-trail!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Ewing, and dropped into a chair on the veranda.

But old Nilam stood like a statue, his red sarong a blotch of vivid color against the gloom of the veranda. He waited, immovable, till Whitman had reached the steps and clambered up, blowing and moaning.

"What calamity is this, *tuan?*" demanded Nilam in Malay, his expression—or rather lack of it—denoting his utter unbelief of what he had heard called across the open space.

"A calamity indeed!" assented Whitman, and pretending great distress, flung himself into a grass chair and bent his head in his hands, groaning.

"It was Piatu!" he gasped, wringing his hands, and speaking in Malay. "He shot the master in the back—I fired at him, and Tuan Blount fired his pistol—but it was too late to save the master. I killed Piatu! He should not have gone out with us to hunt—he has been morose over a chiding that Tuan Blount gave him in the matter of selling *chandu* for the Chinese smuggler. And now we are bereft of a kind master, the head of our island, and the white man who has made Caratan a place of joy, wealth, and safety!"

"This is a woful day, indeed," said Nilam. "But we shall now have in the place of our revered Tuan Blount, the eldest born and only son of our dead master."

"A mere boy—who knows nothing of the way of running an island, nor of your people, Nilam! A stripling who is in America, and who will doubtless bring with him his own foolish friends and advisors, and I shall be no longer here—nor, you, Nilam! You will have no place in his counsels. With our master dead, wisdom and peace will depart from us—and Caratan!"

"I shall bend my neck in submission to the new master, son of him who is gone from us," said Nilam, and bowing, he turned and gave orders to a house-boy that a party should go out to bring in the bodies. "And the carrion of Piatu shall be buried in lime," added Nilam.

At once there was a great clamor and tumult about the big bungalow, and calls to the settlement, and natives running about, while the slow booming of a gong began dolefully from a white building which was the plantation office. The flag flying over it fluttered down to half-staff.

Nilam came out again, wearing now his turban wrapped in the cloth of mourning. He started down the steps.

"We must lead the way to where lies the body of our stricken master," he said, pausing to wait for Whitman to join him.

"The bodies lie where the Semang once placed their charms against the coming of the sickness," said Whitman, without lifting his head from his hands. "Just off the clearing, on the trail that leads to the wild rice, where we sought pigs. My heart is too dead for another sight of our dead master, and do not crush me more. I must make report by letter, and see that the news travels by first boat leaving—also a message of the ill-news to be sent by the white man's magic under the sea to America, telling of the death that has come to us, and that we await the orders of our new master."

Nilam bent his head in understanding and strode away, to join the groups of natives that were gathering near the white building, beating their breasts and crying out that misfortune had come upon them.

Whitman lifted his head and watched. He and Ewing heard the old man address the natives, and then leading a group that carried stretchers, started for the hill-trail, followed by a straggling concourse.

"Are you sure——?" began the white Ewing, in a whisper.

"Yes," said Whitman, turning his head to assure himself that none of the house-boys lingered within hearing.

"It was abrupt, I——"

"Oh, it had to be done, and without delay," said Whitman, tartly. "You always want to temporize—and you'd have stalled until you heard the click of a lock on you. I took the bull by the horns, when he tipped me off this morning—now you'll have to show some spine. You're in this as deep as I am. Come inside."

"Nilam is a crafty old beggar," said Ewing, as he rose, apparently better satisfied with the outlook, now that Whitman bolstered his nerve. "There was something in his eyes that I didn't like as you came up the steps."

"What?" demanded Whitman, curtly, as they entered his room. They both spoke in quiet tones, scarcely moving their lips, a habit they had acquired from many secret conversations under circumstances that held for them danger.

"I don't know just what," said Ewing, impatiently, with a tossing of trembling hands. "You know how he sometimes knows the very thing we are thinking of—that old Arab, or Malay, or whatever he is, gives me the creeps! He seems to be able to read my thoughts, and——"

"Well, he has a job laid out for him now—to read mine," said Whitman grimly.

He took a bottle of spirits from a table, poured himself a drink and one for Ewing. Then the superintendent walked to the partly-open *kajangs* and peered out, to make sure no natives were lurking along the veranda.

"All chased away to the hills," he commented. "But we must be careful—if we get away with things in the next few days, we're safe—and top-dogs here. Anyway, till we've cleaned up and cleared. Even at that, we may stick it out after George comes—he's a fool, most likely, and we can go on taking a good share of profits without his being suspicious."

He sat down in a chair alongside his mosquito-screened bed, and wiped his perspiring brow.

Ewing lit a cigaret and slumped down into a chair, his eyes on the *kajang*-opening, thoughtful, shaken, yet with an air of relief, as if he had suddenly thrown off a period of long strain.

"I can hardly believe it has happened," he whispered. "It will seem so strange, not to have *him* about."

"Perhaps you'd rather have him nosing into your books," suggested Whitman.

Ewing winced.

"Oh, you're right—it had to be done—especially the way he blurted out this morning that he was going to order the young 'un home. Yes, I'm glad you settled the business, so I can sleep——"

"*I* settled it!" exclaimed Whitman, testily. "Sure, I settled it! You'd have whimpered around for the next couple of months, and most likely roused his suspicions with your confounded nervousness. Plain lack of insides, that's what I call it! But, look here, Ewing! While I *did* it, as you're so smart at pointing out, you're in on it, too. Don't forget that! Your neck——"

"Oh, hush, hush!" pleaded Ewing. "I know all that! We're in together, and I'm equally in for anything that turns out. But I can't have the calmness you have—I haven't the decision——"

"Drop it!" broke in Whitman. "This will get us no where, and it's dangerous. The next move is to get away a cable—and a letter—that will keep young George from coming on here—that will hold him off as long as possible. You know why. Hand me that pad and pencil."

"How can we keep him from coming? Won't he want to take charge——?"

"Give me the code-book, and keep still. I want to work out the thing before that crowd gets back from the hills and Nilam is snooping about."

Together, they worked out in cipher, this cable:

Your father slain by native while hunting. Suggest you delay departure for here until you have my letter with more detailed report. Expect native uprising. Must use strong hand and need full authority to act in your place. Natives who were trusted by your father and placed in positions of power are not proving reliable. Doubt exists at present moment as to who can be trusted. Your father's murder probably result of conspiracy in which many more are involved. I have every suspicion of Nilam, though he is playing a crafty game. I killed the slayer, but I find that I have incurred enmity of certain group. If you decide to come at once, let me know. I will prefer to leave Caratan for good when you get here. But I will remain at my post and protect your interests if you grant me full authority to act. Shocked beyond expression at sad fate of your father. Whitman.

"That will do the business," said the superintendent, as he read it over. "It will gum him all up—and scare him out of coming. That will give us time to work out all our plans, and when we've finished—well, he can have what's left!"

"The suggestion of trouble with the natives is just what we needed," said Ewing. "I'd never have thought of it—and as it's in cipher, no one can read it."

"We're all right," said Whitman, and with renewed confidence, took another drink.

They went to a *kajang* and looked out over the open space toward the white house. The news of Blount's death had penetrated by now to the far limits of the plantation, and the workers were coming in from the padi fields, questioning and doleful, having quit work on the discovery that there was a tragedy.

"The more confusion and noise the better," said Whitman. "We must not check anything that keeps old Nilam on the go—and this will give him a great chance to make a speech, and show off a lot of flowery language. Think up every thing you can to suggest for him—let him keep the center of the stage all through the funeral. And I'll have as little to say as possible, and have as little hand in things as seems decent under the circumstances."

"You'd better have something to say," suggested Ewing. "It will look bad if you keep out of it—indignation stuff, you know. It's Nilam I'm thinking about, more than the blighters of natives—the crafty old fox will begin——"

"Oh, all right, all right," broke in Whitman nervously. "I'll have to have a hand in the palaver, to some extent."

They talked for awhile in low tones, and by that time the natives bearing litters were coming in from the hill-trail, swarms of natives following them, and women wailing. The men looked utterly dejected and spiritless, for Blount had been regarded as a protector, and for all his driving ways against the natural indolence of the people, they held him in high esteem—as a Raja, in fact.

Whitman changed his clothes, and appearing on the veranda in white, walked slowly across the open space to the white building, followed by Ewing. Here the people had gathered from the settlement, and there was a hush when the two white men approached.

OLD Nilam led the cavalcade which followed the litter-bearers. And he held up his hand for the party to stop, when Whitman took off his helmet and approached the railing of the veranda of the white house, lifting his hand for silence.

"Disaster has befallen us," he said in the native tongue. "Our master is dead. He was slain by Piatu, who in turn was slain by me. Let the body of this murderer, who has cast a blight upon the community and the fortunes of the people of Caratan, be destroyed in dishonor, and let all his blood relations, including first cousins, have fifty strokes of the bamboo. It is an order. I rule till the son comes to take control. Be quiet and peaceful in respect of the dead. I declare a mourning time of three days, and no work is to be performed. Listen to the orders of Nilam, for I am too stricken in my heart for giving out directions. All that brings joy to me now is that it was by my hand that the murder was avenged—may Shaitan receive him!"

He turned abruptly and gave an order that the body of Blount should be carried into the white house, and the preparations for the funeral be made without delay. Then he and Ewing returned to the big bungalow.

The funeral of Blount was held the next day, and Whitman and Ewing went into retirement and pretended to be in mourning. They were really engaged with the letter to George Blount, which supplemented the cable they had prepared, and added to the falsity of conditions in Caratan. They got both the cable message and letter away to Singapore by the schooner which called on time, and began to plan with great care their actions for the future.

And they kept furtive watch on Nilam, who occupied the house. Ewing was all for finding some excuse to get the old Malay out—to have him live in quarters by himself.

"Can't be done," cautioned Whitman. "Now that I have occupied Blount's room, there is plenty of space for the old man—more than ever. And to shift him would turn him against us, and set him to thinking. If anything, we must coddle him—pretend to depend upon him, ask his advice, and make him feel that he is more on the inside than ever. And he mustn't suspect that we're watching him."

"He suspects it already," said Ewing. "The old fox—I catch him peering at me many a time. I tell you he's not sure that Piatu——"

"You'll have to live by yourself," warned Whitman, "if you can't quit fretting. You play the game, and don't keep my nerves on edge—or—or—I'll——"

He checked himself, and turned away.

"Oh, say it," said Ewing. "—or you'll kill me. I'm not so sure you won't——"

Whitman turned on him with a queer look:

"Ewing, I'll play fair, I promise you that—but you must hold up your end of this thing. I've wiped out your worries, and that ought to satisfy you. So far, so good—but we mustn't quarrel."

"I'll shut up," said Ewing. "No use worrying you, as you say, with my worries. But I'll keep my eyes open on Nilam."

So Ewing dropped the subject of his suspicions about the old Malay, and the pair of white men got on without any seeming differences, going ahead with their plans to strip Caratan of its wealth, or to remain in the place indefinitely and gather the earnings into their own control.

They knew they could not be too abrupt. To check the bank deposits in Singapore or Sydney would arouse suspicions, and they arranged that in time, if George Blount did not come to Caratan, Ewing should go to Singapore, and setting himself up as an independent broker, be in a position to have large sums of money transferred to him.

But it would be several weeks before it would be advisable to begin such operations, and it was necessary that the details be worked out.

The next mail schooner from Singapore brought a cable message—and Whitman, to his amazement, saw that the envelop was addressed to the dead John Blount.

They took the message to Whitman's room.

"This can't be a reply to our cable," he said. "Unless, of course, the cable operator in Singapore, wrote the old man's name on the envelop because the code-word of the address——"

"That's it," said Ewing. "Only a clerk's mistake—and all our messages will come like that. Open it, man!"

They saw at once from the date that it had been filed the day before Blount's death, and allowing for the difference in time, had crossed the message carrying the sad news. This was proven when the message was decoded. It read:

> Dear Father. Last week friend of mine, Tom Alderson, sailed for visit with you. Please regard him as my guest. Has letter which will explain. Need five thousand. Hope you will cable it my bank. George.

Whitman turned and grinned at Ewing.

"Not so bad, eh? He's gummed up with gambling debts. No wonder the old man wanted him home! And all we've got to do is stall him on money and he *can't* get away to bother us."

Ewing dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief.

"That's that!" he remarked. "I don't see him coming to Caratan for a long time—if he needs money. Hold out on him, that's all."

"But not too long," advised Whitman. "If he gets money at regular intervals—not too much at a time—the young whelp will only go the pace. We'll see that he gets enough to keep on with his wild life, but we'll keep him pretty well strapped. Oh, well, this is fine!"

"But this chap who's coming—that the first cable mentioned? What about him?"

"He left before the news of the old man's death reached there," said Whitman. "He won't bother us—if we can't fool him, we'd better quit."

They prepared a reply, assuring young Blount that the money asked for would be cabled, but not to be disappointed if there was delay, for under the changed circumstances, it would not be possible to handle matters speedily. And Whitman expressed the wish that the heir to Caratan would find it possible to come within a reasonable time and take charge himself.

"That'll kill any suspicion there's anything wrong when the remittances are delayed," explained the superintendent. "And we'll have a thousand transferred to his bank in San Francisco, with assurances that more will be on the way. That'll be only a drop in the bucket for him, because he's probably heavily in debt. This is a cinch!"

It was nearly a month before they got the belated cable which acknowledged the message of death. It read:

> Extremely shocked at news. Was away on holiday when your cable arrived, and cannot get to San Francisco inside two weeks from date of this. Impossible leave here sooner than three months, especially as debts prevent me and short of funds. This authority you take complete charge. Appoint as your assistants such natives as you trust. Keep me fully advised. Expedite transfer of money and please see that banks act promptly. Remit as much as you can without interfering with balances needed for conduct of business. George Blount.

Whitman laughed.

"Afraid of his precious skin—that's why he won't come. And in a jam for money. The rebellion scare we put into the cable worked to a T. Now he's willing that we'll take a chance that our bally throats are cut if things go wrong here—and if we pull through, he takes the profits. I know how these young cubs act when they've been turned loose with unlimited cash and no brains. Oh, we'll do some fancy collecting before he gets on the job—and he can have the leavings!"

They treated themselves to a drink, and spent the afternoon in a shady grove where they could be sure they were not overheard, and worked out every move to be made within the next three months.

Also, they discussed a tentative method for getting rid of old Nilam.

"Plenty of time for that," said Whitman. "In the first place, there mustn't be too many sudden deaths here. And if he does get on our trail, he'll turn it to his own advantage, trust him for that! Then, it might be just as well to get him involved in some way so we could shut his mouth. Anyway, we'll settle him without any trouble."

THE weeks slipped by. Money was gradually transferred to George Blount, care being taken that he did not have too much at any one time. There was no difficulty about that, for the more the young man got, the more he wanted.

And his cables of acknowledgement always urged the necessity for larger, and more frequent, remittances.

Whitman and Ewing were at breakfast on the veranda one beautiful morning. There was a sapphire sky, a rosiness over the smooth sea that made it look like a pit of molten fire, and a brightness and freshness over everything that was so characteristic of Caratan.

The two men were now enjoying to the fullest their ease and affluence as controlers of the island. The servants were as loyal to them as they had been to the old owner of the place, for the Malay always defers to power.

"Hello!" said Whitman, as his eyes caught a movement at the point of the headland that shut in the little bay.

It was the gaff-topsail of a schooner, moving slowly among the fronds of the coconuts, as it seemed from where he sat. It moved lazily, and apparently was in doubt as to where she was going, for as it cleared the headland and the schooner became visible, she changed her course and stood away from the land. But with her sail barely drawing, she came about again, and headed for the entrance through the reef to Caratan's anchorage.

Whitman picked up the marine glasses which were always handy on the veranda, and scanned the vessel.

"*Ocean Maid*," he remarked. "Why, that old Manila trader has not been down this way for a couple of years—at least, not close enough in to be noticed. Wonder what she's knocking about for, as if coming in."

But she didn't come through the reef. Instead she slanted away when she was within a few hundred yards of the entrance, checked her way by coming up into the slight breeze, and a boat put off.

"White man," said Whitman, with sudden interest, and looked at Ewing, who lifted his eyebrows.

For a minute they were nervous. They knew it was possible that somebody had been sent to investigate conditions—an auditor, or an inspector sent by a bank at the request of young Blount. But their fears were dispelled immediately, for the skipper, standing at his taffrail, put his hands to his mouth, and bawled lustily—

"Compliments to Mr. Blount—got a passenger for you!"

"It's all right," said Whitman to Ewing. "He hasn't heard that Blount is dead—and that means the passenger doesn't know."

"It's the guest!" exclaimed Ewing, in sudden recollection of the cable which had come before young Blount knew his father was dead.

"Mr. Blount is dead!" called Whitman. "Killed—by—natives several months ago."

"I'll be blowed!" cried the captain, and his voice came distinctly over the water and land in the still, clear air. "Sorry to hear it—but can't stop this trip to pay respects!" And with swaying booms, the *Ocean Maid* went about slowly, begging for breeze, her head-sails shivering listlessly as she stood to sea again, edging out slowly.

The dinghy landed and the white man got out. By the time Whitman and Ewing reached the beach, the boat was rowing out again for the passage through the reef.

The young man in white stood beside a small steamer-trunk and a bag. He wore a white suit, which was a cheap cotton, and hung loosely about his body. He wore amber glasses with bone rims to protect his eyes against the strong sunlight. His thin face was pale, and he looked none too strong. The cheap helmet he wore was thrust back on his head, and damp hair clung to his forehead, for the morning heat was in full strength now, and the beach was blazing. He had lost a tooth, and when he spoke it caused him to lisp with a slight hissing sound.

"My name is Alderson," he said as Whitman drew near, Ewing keeping a trifle in the background. "Is it possible that Mr. Blount is dead?"

"Terrible as it sounds, it's true," said Whitman. "You must be the young man we got a cable about shortly after Mr. Blount's death."

He introduced Ewing.

"Yes, George Blount was kind enough to send me here for a stay. My health has not been very good—and I wanted to study Malay. I intend to go on to Singapore later, but it was arranged that I should stay here at least six months. I trust that Mr. Blount's death won't compel me to change my plans. I can't afford——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Whitman. "Don't think of changing your plans, Mr. Alderson. Better come up to the house now—leave your things for the servants."

Alderson handed over his letter of

introduction, which Whitman glanced at casually, and the trio started up the slope. As they walked, Alderson was peering about eagerly, taking in every strange sight and sound. And Whitman and Ewing contrived to leave him alone on the veranda under the care of the house-boys, who brought cooling drinks and insisted upon another breakfast for the stranger.

Whitman and Ewing, alone, looked at each other inquiringly.

"What do you think?" asked the latter in a whisper.

"Tough luck, in a way, but this chap is a weak sister. It will mean we'll have to fill him with guff, and keep him busy running around the island. But that's easy."

"Infernal nuisance!" said Ewing.

"Don't be too sure," urged Whitman. "I've an idea we can make use of him, to great advantage."

"Don't be absurd."

"Hold up your decisions on that," said Whitman thoughtfully. "As I see it, this lady-like young man is just what we want—to get certain facts before George Blount."

Ewing looked puzzled, and a trifle disgusted.

"It's this way," explained Whitman. "He'll write long and enthusiastic letters home. Also, intimate and detailed letters to George. We must see that this young man has enthusiasm for us—convinced that we are on the job, and so careful of the interest of the heir, and all that. And we can put into George's mind the very things we want him to think—without his having the slightest idea that they come from us. Confidences to this Alderson, and all that. Rumors, hints, alarms—we can play the string out to great advantage."

Ewing nodded.

"You're right," he agreed. "We'll make sure that the letters that go are the sort we want."

"If they are not, they won't go," said Whitman with an understanding nod. "That's up to us."

They rejoined the guest, and spent the day telling him about the unfortunate affair of the elder Blount's death, and such facts about island life as they saw fit to give him—having in mind all the time that it would be retailed to George Blount by mail.

But Alderson, it turned out, wrote very few letters. Upon being told that a mail-boat would be past Caratan within a couple of days, the young man wrote a brief note to George Blount, telling of his arrival, his shock at learning the news of John Blount's death, and the kindnesses of Whitman and Ewing. The pair read the note that evening well satisfied with its simplicity.

THE young man settled down to a studious life, broken by walks about the island. He carried a Malay dictionary, and finding a couple of young natives, engaged their services as teachers of the language, spending most of his time in the palm-grove with them, droning away his repetitions of native words and phrases.

He filled countless note-books, and wandered about the house and veranda whispering to himself words which seemed to give him difficulty.

He generally ate his meals with Whitman and Ewing, who gladly told him tales of Malay character, and aided him with his studies.

His room was between those occupied by Whitman and Ewing, which gave them an opportunity to secretly observe him when he thought he was alone. But they soon gave over watching him. It was obvious that Alderson took affairs in Caratan as they seemed to be, and had little curiosity about the business. In his letters home, there was nothing about them that in the slightest degree revealed any suspicions of what was going on. And as for the letters to George Blount, they were most satisfactory outlines of what Whitman and Ewing told the stranger.

Then there was something altogether unexpected, wholly unforeseen, and to Whitman and Ewing, beyond belief. And it threw them into a panic.

It happened of an afternoon, while Alderson was out of the house—or they thought he was. The mail-boat came past, and sent ashore a small packet. And in this they found a letter for Alderson, which they knew at a glance was from George Blount. They moistened the flap and opened it, taking care that they should not be disturbed by servants.

Dear Aldy (the letter read):

You must be in Caratan by this time, and, of course, know of father's death. It knocked me flat, you may be sure. Now I want you to be careful about what I'm going to tell you—and see that Whitman and Ewing don't get their hands on it, or it may be dangerous for you. If you happen to be reading this in sight of either of them, get away before you read any more.

I don't know just when I'll get down there—as soon as I can, you may be sure of that. And stick on, no matter what happens. Don't be bamboozled into leaving Caratan to go anywhere on any pretext. And if you are invited to take a trip anywhere, pretend to be sick—anything, so long as you stay there. I would have cabled you all this, but I didn't dare, as it would look as if I had already scented something wrong.

Now, I've tried to hold your attention and warn you, so don't read the next sheet until you are safe from observation, for you are probably being closely watched, and you must not inadvertently show any special concern while you are reading this in the presence of either Whitman or Ewing.

Whitman, his mouth open, and his eyes staring, took up the next sheet of the typewritten letter. His hands were trembling, and Ewing, who was looking over his shoulder, muttered an involuntary cry of fear.

I have every reason to believe (the next sheet began), that my father was not murdered by a native——

"Good God!" gasped Whitman.

"Nilam has got word by cable that it was you——"

"Shut up!" snapped Whitman. "Don't you make any breaks like that—about me——"

—at all (the letter went on). In fact, there is something entirely wrong about the whole affair. I've had no word from anybody on Caratan, but my impression that father was murdered is so strong that I'm taking every precaution by cable to see that neither Whitman nor Ewing get away from Caratan——

"We're trapped!" exclaimed Ewing.

"If you don't shut up, I'll kill you!" said Whitman through clenched teeth.

My reports are that Whitman shot my father in the back, and then shot Piatu, the gun-bearer. It's queer, but even in the dense jungle, there's always somebody watching. My poor father already was distrustful of Whitman and Ewing. He had written me that I'd better come home, and that, in order to test the pair, he had been telling them that I was of little account—gambling, and so on. It is probable that they became aware of his intentions to discharge them on my arrival, and being more heavily involved than he realized, they immediately killed——

Whitman crumpled the letter hastily and thrust it into his trousers pocket—there were footsteps coming briskly along the veranda.

"That's Alderson!" whispered Whitman. "He mustn't know about this. Keep still—he won't know we're here—and whatever you do, keep a stiff upper lip. Remember—he knows nothing, as he hasn't seen this letter, and we've still got a chance to get away. We must clean up and clear out!"

But almost immediately there came the clanging of the lunch-gong, as a house-boy went out on the veranda. They kept silent, staring at each other, shaken and waiting until they could collect themselves and present a cool appearance. They helped themselves to stiff drinks, and leaned back on the lounges, hoping they would not be discovered by the house-boys and summoned to lunch.

They heard Alderson asking for them, and the clink of dishes on the table. Finally, Alderson called:

"Mr. Whitman! Mr. Ewing!"

They gave no reply.

Presently Whitman filled a basin with water and laved his face, and sang out—

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Alderson, Ewing?"

"I think he's waiting lunch," said Ewing, and they pretended a bustling about, as if they had just arrived through the back of the house.

"I'll pick a quarrel," whispered Whitman. "That'll cover any shakiness we may show—let me handle him."

A minute later, Whitman, followed by Ewing, appeared on the veranda. Alderson was already at table, his glasses off, and looking much more robust and healthy than when he first came to Caratan.

"Don't you think you're just a trifle abrupt about lunch?" demanded Whitman, sharply, as he stopped and surveyed the guest at table.

"I didn't feel like waiting," said Alderson. "I called and——"

"Good manners would demand more than mere calling for us," said Whitman, with a glance at the table-boy, who stood with hand on the back of a chair. "Please remember, Mr. Alderson, that I'm in charge, and——"

Alderson held up a hand.

"Just a minute," he said. "Don't sit down, please!"

"What's the meaning——"

"Wasn't there a letter for me by the boat this morning?" demanded Alderson.

The question startled Whitman, but it was the change in manner which amazed him more, for Alderson was no longer the mild and shy student.

"There was not!" snapped Whitman. "And I don't understand what——"

"Oh, you'll understand all right before I'm done. There was a letter for me by this mail. And I've been watching you two read it—and listening."

"You sneaking spy!" burst out Whitman, starting for Alderson, hand upraised.

Alderson held up a hand himself—his left. "Wait!" he said, gently. "You two have been reading my letters, which is spying on your guest. But for all your letter-reading, you are not aware that there have *been certain reports*——"

He paused and let his eyes wander to Ewing, whose face twisted in an involuntary spasm of fear as he heard the last three words of Alderson, uttered with a significance that carried a world of menace.

Whitman's hand trembled for a second, but he covered his momentary agitation by making a gesture of disgust. "Reports!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Sure, you can get any kind of a report you want, if you pat my natives on the back and baby 'em down in the palm grove while you're studying Malay——"

Alderson laughed at him. "What you think, Whitman, and what I *know*——"

Ewing, his face red and white by turns, collapsed into a chair, and gave a gurgling moan, covering his face with his hands.

"Blast you!" cried Whitman to Ewing. "Shut up your sniveling!" But Whitman himself, taken with sudden panic, turned and darted for the door.

"Nilam!"

Alderson called the name sharply, and the old Malay, a revolver in one hand and a kris in the other, thrust the door before him and burst out on the veranda, blocking Whitman's path. And from the side *kajangs* came a dozen Malays, all armed.

Ewing started up from his chair and stared about him, as if seeking some way to flee.

"Now look here! What's this all about?" blustered Whitman, but as he looked into the steady eyes of old Nilam, he had a silent answer. Panting like a man who had run for miles, he dropped into a chair. Alderson sat looking at him, calm and unruffled.

"You two might as well take things quietly—there's no use making a fight. And if you think you can start anything, just remember that these men are eager for an excuse to kill both of you."

Whitman pawed at his face with nervous fingers, as if he wished to brush away something that annoyed him. His eyes were on Ewing—with a look of hatred. But Ewing only leaned against the *attap* wall, staring sadly out over the sea, his hands by his side, and his knees bent and trembling. He had the aspect of a man overpowered by the sight of some terrible vision.

"You see, Mr. Whitman," resumed Alderson in that same even tone which rasped Whitman's nerves, "I've been doing something else here since I came, besides studying Malay——"

"What did you come for?" asked Whitman weakly. "What's your game?"

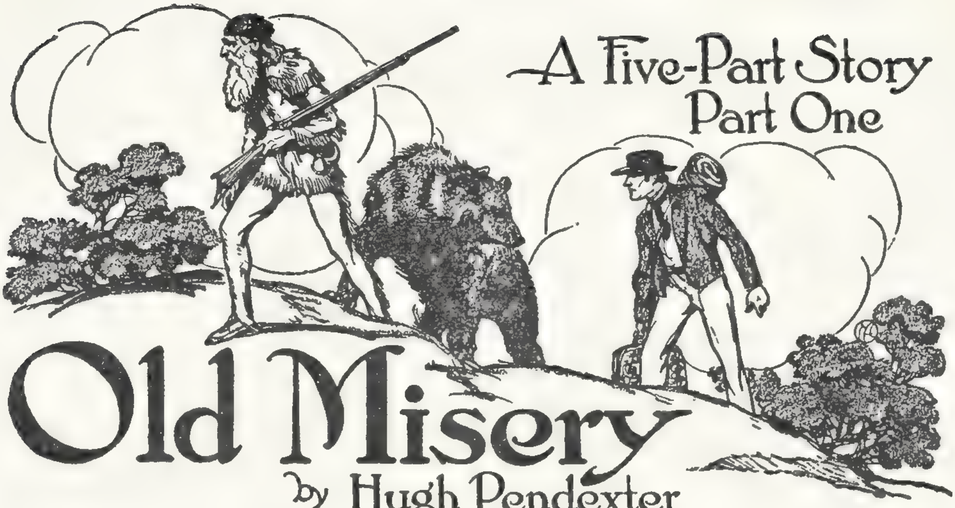
"You cabled George Blount, your employer's son. He sent you a cable about me—which was dated before he could have received the news of his father's death. And there was considerable delay before George Blount got a cable to you, giving you authority to act for him, and informing you that it would be several months before he could get away to visit his old home——"

"What's all that got to do with *this?*" demanded Whitman, waving a hand at the natives about him.

"More than you think. George Blount got your cable. He got *two* cables about his father's death—yours and one from Nilam here. Nilam's told the whole story of how the old man was murdered—for the crime was witnessed by a native hunter hidden in the jungle. I sailed. And George Blount wrote letters to me, to be mailed after I sailed—and one of those letters was the one you and Ewing held up and read this morning."

"But that gives you no license to stick your nose in here!" objected the bewildered Whitman.

"Your objection to me in the business is a natural one. I've omitted to tell you, I know that you killed John Blount. Also, you may be interested to hear that I am George Blount, the son of the man you murdered."



A Five-Part Story
Part One

Old Misery

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Red Autumn," "The Myth Killers," etc.

FOREWORD

THE foundations of the thirty-first State in the Union consisted of placer gold and were unwittingly laid. The precious metal was a magnet that drew from all portions of the globe. No corner was so remote as not to heed the imperious summons once the news leaped oceans and climbed mountains. Men in the prime of life responded, as the adventure was only for the physically fit and resolute. Never was there a land of promise where Nature more generously laid down waterways in pleasant valleys for the convenience of the newcomers, nor where the climate was more beneficially arranged. And the bold and eager swarmed to the lonely shore and turned the vast treasure house topsy turvy. What had been fair vales and majestic forests were shoveled and sluiced into a chaos of raw earth and mud-choked streams.

Among the thousands who flocked to California were many desperate characters from all climes. Penal colonies in Australia were contributed. England sent her worst from home. France was rid of many villains. A strange mixture of little-understood people, meek and evil, swarmed in from the Orient. South American men were among the first to arrive. No section of the Union that failed to send its good and bad. No laws awaited the insweeping hordes. In desperation the decent element patched up a system of justice called Vigilance Committees whenever conditions in spots became intolerable. San Francisco hanged and terrified and scattered the rogues up and down the great valleys to infect the smaller and more remote communities. The outlying centers imitated the Bay, and there were rare hangings.

But crime and gold are ever pals under certain conditions, or so long as a new mining country is without homes, and is not interested in homes. The law-abiding are actuated by the selfish desire to secure plenty of gold and return whence they came. Doctors abandoned their practises, lawyers deserted the court-room, ministers of the gospel ceased from preaching, tradesmen and workmen of all classes forgot their helpful vocations in the mad scramble for gold. When the entire mass of migratory males, unleavened at first by the presence of good women, sought only to "strike it rich" it naturally resulted that the less righteous hunted gold by direct and reprehensible methods.

A woman with an immigrant train, slowly making her way across the plains and throughout the long, dangerous journey caring for two hives of bees, was more prophetic of a majestic State than a gulch full of gold-mad miners. The man who opened a school in San Francisco was a far more valuable citizen than a judge who left the bench to swing a pick. It was the

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woman with the bee-hives and the schoolmaster who planted the idea of "Home" in the rich valleys and along the coast, and made possible a stately structure on foundations of placer gold.

CHAPTER I

EXPENSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

AN OLD man and a young man jostled against each other in front of the Rassette House at Bush and Sansome Streets one afternoon in late April. The first was in San Francisco contrary to his inclination and was striving to kill his sense of loneliness with much whisky. From early manhood he had wandered far and wide west of the Missouri River and never felt so much at ease as when alone in a hostile Indian country, or when exploring little-known mountains. The other already was wishing himself back in the placid, orderly life of quiet Vermont. He had had his high hopes but the long voyage through the Straits of Magellan, marked by much physical suffering, had profoundly depressed him. When he bumped into the white-whiskered, white-haired mountain man he was clinging to but one desire; to crawl into a stationary bed and remain there. He was scarcely conscious of the collision until the old man jolted him to attention by belligerently warning:

"Keep the trail, younker. This place is more mixed up than a Crow village, but there's foot-room for all if you don't play the hog."

Joseph Gilbert, just landed, glanced at the man meekly, too miserable to resent any fault-finding. Followed by characterizations of "greenhorn" and the like he wearily carried his large carpet-bag into the hotel. He had been one of the first ashore, inwardly vowing he would return overland regardless of all perils. At the wharf he had found a splendid omnibus—he first supposed it to be the private equipage of a millionaire—and had requested the driver to set him down at any good hotel. He would not have noticed the mountain man at all if it had not been for his curious garb. Suits of buckskin were not seen in Vermont. In Frisco on this prime April day in fifty-three a man could have worn a bathrobe through the business section and attracted no attention. Gilbert unconsciously tucked away in memory a recollection of the queer old man cased in clothes of skin. The house was heavily patronized but he secured a room, turned his money over to the clerk and went to bed.

There followed days of recuperation and soul-building; rather pleasant after he had been initiated into the luxury of taking some of his meals in bed. Home folks would have been much scandalized could they have known of such unheard of ways of living. Fortunately a continent stretched between the Rassette House and the Vermont village. Finally his voracious appetite told him he was well, and conscience rebuked him for not being about his business.

On the second morning of May he awoke to discover a new Joseph Gilbert, one who loudly scoffed at the breakfast-in-bed habit. This new fellow bounded to the middle of the floor and made haste to get outside and discover the world. He was secretly dismayed on descending to the office to be presented with a bill at the rate of ten dollars a day, plus certain extras. Back home a dollar a day at the Commercial House would have entitled him to the best, although only a hopeless invalid would have been permitted to eat in bed.

However, Joseph had money to match his good clothes, and he paid without any visible qualms. He realized he must reconstruct his lines of thought to fit in with the new environment. One must not heed the cost when every man was a potential millionaire. The Rassette House had taken no money from him, he told himself; some gold mine in the foot-hills of the Sierra Nevada was paying the bills. And in rather an exuberant frame of mind he left his bag and went forth to transact certain business. His plans had been made ahead with New England thoroughness and he could leave almost immediately for Coloma and plunge into the thrilling work of picking up chunks of gold.

As he strolled up Bush Street he changed his original ideas about the city. He was glad he had not followed his first plan of wearing his old clothes. The day of ragged hats and stogy boots and rough shirts was rapidly passing, especially in San Francisco. He saw all nationalities and all sorts of dress, but he missed the rough-garbed, frowsy type so often pictured in the *Illustrated News*.

There were immaculately clad Englishmen; Easterners and Southerners in the latest Parisian modes; men from South America and Mexico, barbaric with silver buttons and gold chains. French workmen were neat in their blouses; and there had been a certain smartness in the old man's heavily-fringed collar, or cape, and fringed trousers. There were many men, all erroneously dubbed "Yanks," in black broadcloth coats with long skirts, black trousers, black satin waistcoats, and stove-pipe hats. After walking a block the young pilgrim decided the Anglo-Saxon, Gallic and Celtic men were very proud of their beards; and he forthwith decided to encourage his own frail whiskers to grow. Oriental types, and men whose natal land he could not guess, gave much color and dash to the streaming street scenes.

His first stop was at the Wells, Fargo and Company's office. He assumed the entire morning would be required in transacting his piece of business. After briefly examining his credentials a clerk bruskly demanded how he "would have it." And he began stacking twenty-dollar gold pieces in piles of ten. On finishing the seventh pile he noticed Gilbert's embarrassment and asked:

"Bothered about carrying it? Haven't you a belt? Nuisance to pack it around with you. Better let us send it on to await your order at Coloma."

Gilbert was nettled at the clerk's quickness in arriving at conclusions. Then again, how was he to know the fourteen hundred dollars would be waiting for him at Coloma? Back home the president of the small village bank would have used a day in deciding on the best mode of procedure.

"I'll take it with me," he told the clerk. "I haven't a belt. Perhaps I can leave it here until I buy one."

"Wait a minute," barked the clerk.

He darted to the rear of the room and quickly returned with a worn but serviceable money-belt.

"Step around the corner and slip it on."

Gilbert did as told. Then, sensitively alive to the fact that high prices ruled in San Francisco, he inquired—

"How much do you tax me for that?"

"Nothing. Fellow threw it aside when he came in from the mines. We're glad to get rid of it. But we can give you an order and save you packing that stuff to Coloma. Joaquin's mighty busy these days, from Shasta to Sonoma."

Gilbert knew nothing about the individual mentioned, and he thought the remark irrelevant; and he rather resented the imputation he could not look out for himself.

"It ain't heavy. I'll carry it. Thank you."

He was used to hard work, and the weight of the gold would have been nothing had it been on his back; but, never having worn a heavy belt before, he quickly found it to be an inconvenience. He felt as if he had increased his waist measure by several feet and that every one was staring at him. As this diffidence wore off he proceeded to secure an outfit. Remembering the clerk's intimation that danger might attend a man carrying gold, his first purchase was an Allen revolver, pepper-box pattern. This weapon, earnestly assured the merchant, was far better than a Colt navy revolver, thirty-eight caliber and weighing two pounds and ten ounces. He prided himself he shopped shrewdly, making his selections sparingly and with much care although the man displayed a multitude of devices and solemnly insisted each was vitally necessary in gold-mining. He bought two blankets, rolled his purchases in them, carried the bundle to the hotel, and deposited it with his carpet bag.

His next move was to find a room in a boarding-house; for he planned to take the boat to Sacramento in the morning and did not intend to pay ten dollars for another twenty-four hours at the Rassette House. He found a place near the wharves where he could enjoy a poor room and bed for two dollars without being murdered, and shifted his luggage.

Left free to enjoy the day, he discovered his principal interest was in food. He was especially pleased with Winn's Branch at Montgomery and Washington Streets as no liquors were served and the place was as clean as a Puritan kitchen. His appetite was ravenous and threatened to put him in the ten-dollar-a-day class—aside from his room rent. It was ingrained prudence and New England thrift, however, rather than any fear of being penniless among strangers, that troubled him. According to his upbringing it was "wicked" to spend so much money on one's self. Yet he could not resist the appeal of a tempting window-display, the lure of spotless table-cloths and the appetizing aromas. And, although feeling guilty, his mind purred sleekly as he indulged in broiled quail and coffee at Carleton's on Commercial Street.

This was followed two hours later by a lunch beyond his powers of analysis in a French cabaret. When he was not eating he was fighting the temptation of a mutton-chop in an English lunch-house, a boiled dinner in an American dining-room, or some hot, thirst-provoking dish in a Mexican *fonda*. And he succumbed to roast sucklingpig in a German *wirthschaft*. The Chinese *chow-chows* were too smelly, and the Italian *osterie* too mysterious.

Food being his obsession, the markets naturally interested and amazed him. He had never imagined any mart could offer for sale such a variety of game, ranging from squirrels to bears, from curlew to geese, all garnished with a bewildering assortment of sea foods. He gloated over the display. To escape temptation he walked up Russian Hill and saw the spot where José Forni was hanged, the first legal execution in San Francisco. He wandered out Pacific Street toward Lone Mountain, where it was planned to locate a new cemetery, but the exercise made him hungry and he soon turned back. Although another year was to pass before the mercantile depression would reach its lowest level the markets already were feeling the oversupply of goods, and auctions were being held on many streets. He gained the impression that this quick method of vending was the principal occupation in the city.

It shocked his sense of thrift to observe the great quantity of discarded clothing. Nothing like such waste was to be found in New England. And the mountains of empty bottles caused him to fear the people at the Bay were very bibulous. Toward early evening he wandered down to the steamboat company's office and paid ten dollars for a cabin to Sacramento. He could have gone "deck" for seven dollars; and back home none was so affluent as not to save the difference. He eased his conscience by telling himself the undiscovered goldmine was paying the shot. Yet the latent fear that he was too rapidly succumbing to extravagance influenced him to forego his plan of attending the theater. By not buying a theater-ticket he would save the difference between cabin and deck passage. He would stroll the streets for an hour, eat a light supper (for one must live) and go to bed.

He passed the gambling-halls on Commercial Street, and wondered that men could be so weak as to risk their money on games of chance. He loitered around the ugly, fenced-in plaza, or Portsmouth Square, and took in Dupont and Kearney streets, ignorant of the ruffianism that lurked in that quarter. The sound of orchestra music brought him to a halt before a brilliantly lighted place. It faced the plaza, but the name, "El Dorado," told him nothing. A stream of well dressed men and a sprinkling of women were entering. A few were coming out. A sign by the door read:

MASQUERADE TONIGHT. NO WEAPONS ADMITTED

"What's the admission?" he asked a man outside the door.

"Free gratis for nothing," replied the door-tender. "Shell out your guns and knives."

"I am unarmed," Gilbert informed him.

"None of that," growled the man.

He seized Gilbert by the shoulders and whirled him about and pawed him over most dexterously.

"——if you ain't!" exclaimed the man. "Move along."

Halting inside the door, Gilbert watched several men surrender their arms in exchange for a bit of pasteboard. There were a few who disclaimed possessing either knife or pistol, and these were promptly searched; and in all instances, Gilbert observed, took their bits of pasteboard. Then the quietness of the place was disturbed by a loud whoop, and a figure in fringed buckskin was demanding entrance.

The white hair and yellowish-white beard, and the peculiar garments, at once identified him in Gilbert's mind as the man he had blundered into in front of the hotel.

"Shell out your guns and knives," directed the outer door-tender.

He was joined by an employee stationed inside the door.

"I'll shell 'em out in a Snake village or a Crow camp. I'll shell 'em out when I squat to smoke a pipe with the Sioux. But I don't give 'em up in this lodge," stoutly and loudly refused the mountain man.

"Then you don't go in, old man."

The mountain man stared at the door-tender curiously, and his voice was low as he remarked:

"Son, when folks tell Old Misery he can't do a thing, that thing is the very thing he hankers to do. I come with a peace-pipe; but I can paint for war afore you can tell your true name. I'm looking for some one, a streak of scarlet. A tempest'ous young female hellion. Good gal, but she will sneak away from her old grandpap when he forgits hisself and fetches her a crack. I've hunted through a hundred and forty-eight places like this, looking for her. All I want to do is to take a peek inside. Then I'll back-trail."

"Nary a look till you've shelled out your weapons," was the firm reply.

Old Misery stroked his beard reflectively. It was obvious to the two men he was weakening.

The second man spoke up and ordered:

"You clear out of here. No place for an old codger like you."

Old Misery slowly swung his head about to glance at the speaker, and he placidly agreed:

"Mebbe you're right. But, you see, I've always had to find out things for myself. I'll go away——"

"Shuffle along. You're blocking the door."

"Erhuh. I'll go away," gently repeated the mountain man. "I'll be gone long enough to take a few snorts of red liquor. When I'm tuned up as I oughter be to enj'y it, I'm coming back and coming through that door. But I ain't ornery, and I won't jump you two grass-and-root Injuns. You'll have warning. You'll hear my war-cry and have time to get your tribe together. Then you hear me make the eagle scream."

He swung away with the long, sure stride of the mountain man.

The outside guard stared after him blankly; then exploded—

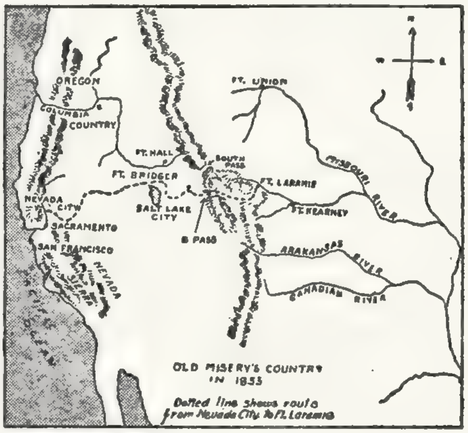
"What'n —— you make of him, Bill?"

"I dunno," wearily replied the second man, retreating inside the door. "If he shows up again, which he won't, just heave him over the plaza fence."

Gilbert was glad the ancient man had not been permitted to enter. The old fellow appeared to be in a quarrelsome mood, and he might recognize the young man who had bumped against him, and make a scene. He also was glad the old fellow had not been misused.

TURNING his attention to the long room, he made two discoveries; he was in a gambling-hall, and only a few of those present were masked. Although advertised as a masquerade there was no merriment. Instead of a gay scene of make-believe there were various tables, each with its group of devotees. Almost all the games were presided over by beautiful women elegantly dressed. As his gaze lifted he saw pictures on the wall that made him blush; but as no one appeared to notice them he tarried and slowly ventured down the room.

On his right was a long bar glittering with silver and glass. Back of it and along the other walls was a profusion of mirrors. Bartenders in spotless white were deftly mixing drinks. At the end of the hall, in a balcony that extended nearly across the room, was an orchestra of seven pieces. Gilbert decided he had never heard music until this night. On the left and near the entrance was a roulette wheel. Beyond it, along the wall as well as down the middle of the room, were various bank games. Nearly all the men present wore stove-pipe hats, although here and there was a slouch hat. Dress, however, was indicative of nothing in the El Dorado; nor in San Francisco. A tatterdemalion might be a millionaire, while the well-groomed, exquisitely attired individual most likely was a gambler.



OLD MISERY'S COUNTRY IN 1853

Dotted line shows route from Nevada City to Ft. Laramie

Just in front of Gilbert a man and a richly dressed woman sat side by side at a rouge-et-noir table. The man had his arm around the woman's waist and with untiring good-nature was supplying her with money while she feverishly placed bets and repeatedly lost. Their deportment embarrassed Gilbert and he passed on below the bar and halted before a curtained alcove. Just above him were the musicians, the best money could hire in San Francisco, and he watched them for some minutes. He felt at ease because his presence was completely ignored. He renewed his scrutiny of the tables.

Close at hand was a monte game with the usual Mexican dealer, only now it was a young woman. Around it were gathered those desiring a simple game, and monte was ever the favorite with novices. The dealer, too, must have been an attraction. Her crimson lips, her flushed cheeks, and her half-closed, riotous eyes, and the perpetual little smile quirking the corners of her mouth, all made her a tantalizing picture. Red high-heeled slippers and red stockings contrasted vividly with the draperies of black lace and the black lace scarf falling from the top of her high-piled hair. The bodice of her gown was shockingly low-cut, decided the Vermonter, whose ideas of evening toilet had been gathered at church socials back home.

At first he disapproved of the woman, or girl—he could not decide on her age. Finally he concluded she was several years younger than himself, and that if not for her bizarre costume she would remind him of one of the Walker girls at home—the dark one. Back of her was a faro layout, endorsed by gamblers and all who preferred big wagers. A low exclamation as some one made a big winning caused the group at the monte table to melt away and view the lucky man.

The girl, left without a patron, smiled at Gilbert, nodded pleasantly and softly called out—

"It is jus' to match the card, *Señor Americano*."

Her voice held only a trace of accent and his inborn prejudice against "foreign women" vanished. He suddenly discovered he was lonesome. The orchestra was playing a wailing Southern melody that almost made him homesick. He diffidently approached the table, trying to assume an air of worldliness.

She continued smiling in a friendly way and murmured:

"Ah, my boy is in luck tonight. I see luck in his face. A ver' bold *caballero*. He will make a big keeling."

He glanced about to discover her boy. She divined his perplexity and laughed at him and explained:

"You, *Señor Americano*. Luck is in your face. Maria reads the face. She knows when young men come to lose or come to win. My gold trembled when you came to the table."

Before he could tell her he never gambled she was shrugging her bare shoulders and adding:

"But it is not Maria's money you win. What do I care? It is jus' to match the card. It is ver' simple."

She was so "neighborly" he longed to talk with her. He mumbled something about "never gambling." She apparently did not hear him, and began shuffling the cards and nodded for him to place his bet. After all, his paying for the privilege of talking with her a bit would not be gambling. And he fished a gold piece from his pocket and put it down without understanding the game in the least.

He was astounded to find he had won enough to keep him at an excellent hotel for two days. His New England bias, the reflection of teaching rather than the result of experience, began to fade. Surely the institution of gaming could not be wholly evil when it good-naturedly bestowed gold on him. Out of decency he would risk what he had won. In truth, aside from his winning he believed he owed something for the music and the melodious voice so artfully encouraging, praising and admiring him.

He learned he was daring and skilful. He threw down a coin and won again.

The girl laughed delightedly, and cooed:

"Let the *caballero* remember what Maria says. He has luck in his face. Once in a big while a man wins at cards and with women. Is it not so? *Sí*."

Gilbert's face grew warm beneath the bold compliment, yet he approved of it. He had always suspected he had a reckless streak in his makeup.

The girl continued:

"It is the man who does not care for a bit of gold, or a bit of love, who always wins. Is it not? *Sí*."

A rapid calculation told Gilbert he would soon have winnings sufficient to pay all expenses he had incurred in San Francisco. What was especially refreshing was the girl's joy at his success. Then came the insidious, ambitious thought to make the game pay all his expenses from New York. A turn of the card would do it. He trebled his bet as a starter, and lost.

"Nex' time," she gaily encouraged. "Always make it twice the losings and *señor* mus' always get it back. Ver' brave in the face. It is such Maria would always have win."

Flushed and irritated at having the greater part of his gains swept away, Gilbert resolved to win them back. He pulled his gold from his pocket, but lacked enough to double the last wager.

Before he could venture what he had the girl was murmuring:

"*Señor* is hones'. He will pay out of his winnings. Maria knows an hones' man." And she placed some coins to one side. "It is not allowed, but *señor* is hones'."

She was a good girl, he told himself. She wanted him to win. He was sure to win next time. He nodded to show he accepted the bank's credit and put down his money. The card was dealt, and he was dismayed to see his gold crossing the table. She pouted in pretty chagrin.

"Nev' mind," she soothed. "Behind the curtains *señor* can take off his money-belt. Then come back while he has the game alone. Last night a young *Americano* lost and lost, but took away sixteen t'ousand dollars with him before he stopped."

Her liquid eyes opened and grew very round as she imparted this bit of information.

There was no question about his removing the money-belt she so shrewdly guessed he was wearing; he owed her money. It was nothing serious, yet it bothered him and wounded his pride. He could easily explain to the Coloma men he had run out of funds and had borrowed a trifle. He passed behind the curtains and got at his belt and extracted three twenty-dollar gold pieces. That would cover the debt to the girl. His fare to Sacramento and room rent for the night were paid. As he was replacing the belt he realized he must have something to live on and pay stage-coach fare, and he might as well borrow it from the belt now as later. Then temptation took him by the throat and demanded why he lacked courage to bet at least three times more in an effort to recover his losses. And his fumbling fingers pulled out several more double-eagles.

When he returned to the table a waiter had just left, after depositing a large goblet of champagne.

"For you, *Senor Americano*. A gif' from the house," the girl informed him.

He scarcely knew the taste of liquor and never had seen champagne. But it looked very harmless, and excitement had parched his throat. He sipped, approved, and emptied the goblet.

"Mighty good tasting cider," he endorsed as he paid his debt.

He won a "*bravo*" by proceeding to bet, winning and losing for some minutes. Suddenly he realized he had the courage of a small lion. It hurt him scarcely any when he lost. He was a millionaire in optimism. High gods were smiling on him. The gold pieces multiplied and dwindled. When they crossed the table he smiled reassuringly at the girl; they would return. All the time he was conscious of the music and found it a pleasing background while he dramatized himself in a dashing rôle.

The waiter brought a fresh goblet, and he tossed it off and his luck ceased seesawing and he won quite steadily. He was more than a thousand dollars ahead and drank to his luck. Now his heart was that of a full-grown Numidian lion. All others in the room, excepting the laughing girl, were pygmies. He never felt so scornful of humanity in his life before.

His ambition expanded. Expense money and the winnings before him were nothing. The El Dorado looked to have much gold. Surely his gold-mine was here instead of in the hills. And he found himself returning an empty goblet to the table without remembering having picked it up. At times the face of the laughing girl was a bit blurred. It impressed him as being very humorous that the El Dorado should be conducted, and music furnished, just for his benefit. He laughed heartily at the quaintness of it all.

He found himself emerging from the alcove with a handful of gold. He could not recall whether he retired to conceal his winnings or to borrow from the belt. The latter thought was dismissed as being impossible. He could not have lost his winnings without knowing it. However, there were the table and the smiling girl and she was waiting for him to place a bet. That he should continue to be the only player at the table touched his curiosity none. Had he seen her signal to the floorman to steer away would-be patrons of the game he would have found nothing sinister in it. With kindly egotism he would have set it down to her preference for his company. He was fond of Maria. He put down all his gold and raised the goblet, and over the rim saw the double-eagles traitorously desert him for the other side of the table. He replaced the goblet untasted and made for the alcove.

There must have been moments of realization and moments of frenzy behind the curtains before he came to himself partly sobered; for the empty belt on the small table was ripped to pieces, showing how desperately he had searched. And one of his trousers pockets was inside out. He dug his hand into the other and found it empty. The shock quite sobered him. His head was aching severely. It was incredible, monstrous. He pawed back the heavy hangings on the wall, thinking they were the curtains between the alcove and the hall. He found a window and forced it open and rested his head on the sill while the night air played over him and further restored his wits. He had his ticket to Sacramento, his blanket roll and carpet-bag, and that was all.

Turning back to the curtains, he stood between them, clutching them with both hands, and glared at the smiling monte dealer; only now she was smiling on a grizzled miner and coaxing:

"*Señor* has the luck in his face. Is it not? *Si.*"

"None o' that for me, you hussy," growled the miner as he passed on.

Had he had his Allen's revolver with him Gilbert's despair might have urged him to end his existence, thereby probably inflicting serious injury on several in the main hall.

He rushed to the table and fiercely accused—

"You've ruined me!"

"La, la," she derisively returned, leaning back and resting her slim brown hands on her hips and tilting her head to smile up at him. "Men always blame the woman. Is it not? *Sí.* If *señor* will bet like a madman how could Maria stop him? Let him get more gold and come back and break my poor little bank."

"God help me!" groaned Gilbert, too overwhelmed to sustain an angry mood. "It was not my money I lost. I am a thief!"

The girl's laugh died out. A slim-built man, wearing a rich Mexican costume and a narrow half-mask, had paused behind Gilbert in time to hear the agonized confession, and he laughed aloud. Gilbert heard the laugh but was beyond resenting it. The world was now divided into two factions; those who would mock and deride, and those, whom he had called friends, who would be horrified by his crime. Neither pity nor exculpation awaited him. The gay *caballero* swung around the table and nodded slightly as he glanced down into the awe-filled eyes of the girl and then passed on to the faro table where some forty thousand dollars in gold was stacked in double-eagles and fifty-dollar slugs. Five other masked men, all wearing the Mexican costume, were also deeply interested in the faro game. Gilbert returned to the alcove and the open window.

THE door-tender was yawning and wishing the night was over. He turned his head to remark as much to the man stationed a few feet inside the entrance. Then his mind was diverted by a hand clutching his collar and jamming him back against the door-casing; and the white-bearded man in buckskin was informing him:

"Never told a lie in my life when I could help it. Promised on the pipe to come back, and here I be. Fit as a fiddle now to wade through——!"

He frightened the helpless door-tender by lifting a raucous voice and beginning to sing something in a strange tongue. Then in English he was crying:

"Whoop! Sorter prickles your hide, does it? It oughter. The scalp-dance song of the Chippewa. They sing it when returning from the Sioux country with scalps on long poles. I'm fit as a fiddle, I tell you. I'm 'Old Misery,' half timber-wolf, half grizzly, and I'm going inside with my war-paint on."

The second man recovered from his astonishment and sprang through the door. The door-tender, now he was being reenforced, remembered he was hired for his muscular ability, and he attacked the old man. There was a rare flurry of revolving arms and legs that attracted and held the attention of the patrons.

Then a man was shooting along the floor on his stomach toward the roulette wheel, and the other caromed against the end of the bar.

The mountain man was standing erect, grinning ferociously and defying:

"I never give up my weepins. Let the head Injun of this wigwam call in his braves and chuck me out. Whoop! 'I'm dancing round a man's scalp.' There's a song for you! I've heard it when it meant bloody heads. Bring on your fighting men; for I'm looking for a streak of scarlet, whose old grandpap wants her back with him; and I'm gentle's —— looking for trouble."

Down the room Maria gave a squeal of fear.

Old Misery's quick gaze picked her out, and he bellowed:

"You young limb of sin, come here! You white folks keep back. That gal's got to go with me into the mountains. Any one cuts in and he'll think he's met up with old Flat Mouth, chief of the Pillager Chippewas. Maria, I'm waiting."

She started hurriedly up the room. The dealer of the faro game yelled:

"Don't let any one out! I'm robbed! Six masked men, dressed like greasers!"

Gilbert heard the clamor and started to leave the alcove. Six men came through the curtains; and the one who had laughed at him flung him half across the table.

From the hall men were shouting—

"Some one brings us guns!"

The leader of the bandits thrust his hand through the curtains and with two shots extinguished as many lights.

One of the masked men exclaimed in English—

"We must shoot our way out before they get guns!"

Gilbert realized they were in some great trouble; that there was danger of some one being killed. He yanked back the wall curtains and revealed the open window. As women shrieked in the hall, and as men shouted and cursed and scrambled to obtain weapons, the bandits leaped through the opening, the leader going last. And each was carrying a heavy bag in each hand with the exception of the leader who carried one bag, small one.

As the leader lighted on the sidewalk Gilbert, now thoroughly scared, landed on his back, sending him on his hands and knees into the road. Gilbert rolled against the side of the building and struck something that jingled. The bandit leader, now erect, fired shots through the open window but did not see the figure against the wall. He turned and ran after his men. Gilbert got to his feet and, clutching the bag under his coat, ran in the opposite direction.

It was pandemonium inside the hall. Maria crawled under a table and Old Misery dragged her out and yelled commands in her small ear. Then he was through the alcove and through the window and running like a deer after the six men, now far up the street. And as he ran he fired with a Colt's .38. One of the men dropped behind a drygoods box. On ran the mountain man, sounding his Chippewa war-whoop, alternating it with a similar defiance in the Crow and Blackfoot tongues. A streak of flame shot over the top of the box. Old Misery left the ground, and while in mid-air fired down at the crouching figure.

He was standing by the dead body when men began pouring around the corner of the hall and jumping through the alcove window.

"Is it Joaquin?" cried the foremost.

The mountain man removed the mask and grunted in disgust.

"Only one of his men. Chief told him to drop back and git my sculp as I was the only man in the street. Lucky I fit my way in there tonight, or you wouldn't 'a' had even one pelt to show. I don't want his ha'r. I'll be going."

"See anything of a young feller, dressed like a Eastern greenhorn, or an Englishman?" cried the faro dealer.

"No. If you send horsemen outside the city you may pick up their trails. They'll split up. Better watch the boats. Some may try to git away by water."

He turned and trotted around to the entrance of the El Dorado, and this time no one attempted to halt him. The place was in great confusion. The name of 'Joaquin Murieta' was being tossed about in tones of fear.

"Faugh! A grass-'n'-root Injun could make these greenhorns run," he derided.

Then he passed to the monte table where the girl Maria sat with head bowed and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Did you get him?" she whispered without lifting her head.

"Along of stopping to make sure of you and making my word good to old Miguel I didn't have a chance to catch even a ox. Now you git to cover and change into honest clothes. You'd shame a 'Rikara squaw. You're going back with me in the morning. You'll be lucky if somebody don't think you stood in cahoots with that —— skunk. He was round your table. And I can remember when they hung a woman of your race in Downieville."

She shivered with fear, and whispered:

"I have been a bad girl, *Señor Comandante*. I will be at the boat in the morning."

"You ain't bad at heart, Maria. Just a trifle wild. Your grandpap won't lambast you again. I've give him his orders. But this trick was nervy and like Joaquin. Wish I could 'a' come to grips with him. But he can't keep it up. They'll yet be showing his head and 'Three-Fingered Jack's' crippled hand right here in this town."

AT THE same moment the mountain man was finishing his prophecy Gilbert was blocks away, making for his lodgings. It was some time before he could locate the house, and he might have been remarked for his wild expression and disheveled appearance had not the visit of the Sonora Tiger thrown that section of the city into an uproar.

Once his heart nearly ceased beating as he halted in the shadow of a wall and heard a man telling a group of other men:

"They weren't all greasers, I tell you. Joaquin had help from a young fool of an American or an Englishman, who was losing a pot of gold at the monte table while waiting for the band to strike. He was in that small room two or three times before they got the gold, two bags to a man. And he went through the winder with them. If I lay my peepers on him he'll stretch a rope fine."

Death at the hands of a mob seemed very close. He flattened himself against the wall, hoping the darkness would save him. Help came in the guise of the fire-bell. He did not know what it meant, but every denizen of San Francisco knew who had lived there a year. Joaquin Murieta was forgotten for the time. The frightened populace poured from hotels and lodging-houses and homes, from gambling-hells and drinking-resorts. Important business conferences were broken up, and theaters were emptied. A hoarse shouting filled the streets; then came the punctuating clamor of the racing fire-companies. The tramping of feet over the planked streets gave off a dull booming sound.

Gilbert pressed on, and a man directly in front of him yelled:

"By——! If it ain't the Rassette House!"

The wild thought entered Gilbert's head to claim he lost his gold in the fire. This suggested the fiction Joaquin had robbed him of it in the El Dorado. But he knew he could not persevere in any deception. Some of the Gilberts might be fools, but it was an honest strain. However, it was the burning of the hotel Gilbert had quit that morning that afforded him a safe passage to his humble lodgings. A strong northeast wind was blowing, and only the improvements in fire protection saved the entire city from being consumed. Men were running to their stores and offices to to save precious papers.

Gilbert, running madly for his room near the wharves, was not noticed. All was confusion. Panting from fear rather than from exhaustion, Gilbert stood at his window and watched the ruddy splotch on the sky widen and brighten. He did not remember the bag he had brought along with him and had dropped on the bed until he tried to sleep. It contained three hundred dollars. It belonged to some one, perhaps to the management of the El Dorado. But the hall had taken more than a hundred dollars of his money and fourteen hundred of gold he had been carrying in trust for certain men in Coloma. He counted the three hundred dollars as his legitimately. Toward morning he dozed off a bit; then feared he would miss the boat and arose and set forth with his luggage at sunrise.

In a small eating-house on the wharf he obtained beefsteak and coffee and heard the proprietor discussing the fire and Joaquin, the mountain robber with his patrons.

"Greasers probably got clear of the town. Must 'a' had hosses close by," he remarked.

"Some talk about a young Englishman helping them to get away," mumbled a customer.

"Young American, not English," corrected the proprietor. "The men ain't taking any chances! All boats will be watched."

"They all say the greasers rode for it, but that the young feller never quit the town," spoke up another. "He's the one they plan to pick up. Figure he planned the robbery, knowing the lay of the land. El Dorado people say that window is hid by hangings and ain't been open for a long time. No one with weapons got by the door.

"Young feller opened the window and guns was passed in to him by a greaser outside. He stuck to the monte table till the outlaws come by. He either give them guns then, or left them in the little room, where all they had to do was step in and get them."

"That was —— well planned!" exclaimed the proprietor. "Those cusses are keen all right."

"That old man who come in and got every one to watching him strikes me as being another of the band," suggested a third man.

Hoots of derision greeted this surmise, and the proprietor indignantly cried:

"No truth in it. That was Old Misery from up in the hills. Sells bears and animals to the miners and the towns. Good Lawd! He's the one that shot and killed one of the band. They say the dead man is 'Scar-Faced' Luis, Joaquin's best shot."

"Be back in a minute," Gilbert told the proprietor, who was broiling his steak. "Feel ailing and want to get some whisky."

"Keep squatting," said the proprietor, and he set forth a bottle.

It warmed his stomach and made him feel better, and he tried another. Then he was able to eat his breakfast. With bold step he left the eating-house and went to discover what new evil fate had in store for him. His artificial courage vanished the moment he beheld two grim-visaged men, with big revolvers in their belts, standing at the foot of the gang-plank with the ship's officers. He mingled with the gathering crowd to escape their gaze. He was still striving to discover some way of boarding the boat unseen when he halted beside a handsome woman whose seductive eyes met his and frankly appraised his Eastern clothes and beardless face.

To a short, stout man who appeared to be attending her she remarked:

"Look here, Roger. He'd make a good juvenile. He has the air."

Roger examined Gilbert's confused face critically and growled:

"None of that, Lola. You'd have every cub in California trailing after you. Then there'll be more trouble. Wait till after we've played Sacramento and the other towns before casting your siren spell."

She laughed heartily and again directed her bold gaze at Gilbert's flushed face. Desperation dispelled embarrassment.

He managed to smile and ask—

"Are you a play-actress?"

"Good ——, young man!" loudly exploded Roger. "Mean you don't know by sight the wonderful and beautiful Lola Montez?"

"I've heard lots about her. I shall go and see her if she plays in Sacramento," recklessly lied Gilbert.

"You're a dear," said the actress. "But I'll wager you've heard naughty stories about me. Nevertheless, you shall be my theater guest at Sacramento. Roger, you be sure he gets a ticket."

"If all your admirers are passed in free we won't have a cent in the house," grumbled Roger. "I'll fix him."

Miss Montez was laughing shrilly at the compliment as the crowd surged forward. She was beaming on Gilbert coquettishly as they mounted the gang-plank. Gilbert with his face turned toward the actress thrust out his ticket and felt it plucked from his fingers.

One of the men with revolvers called out:

"Pleasant trip, Miss Montez. Many nuggets, and come back soon."

She laughed shrilly and waved her hand. Once on deck Gilbert glanced back and saw the two citizens stop and sharply question three young men. Then he took his luggage to his cabin and ventured forth to find Miss Montez. He believed she was his shield and buckler. But she had retired to her cabin to make up some sleep.

Roger, however, was at the bar telling the thirsty crowd what a great actress Lola Montez was. Gilbert worked to his side so as to be identified with him; and he prayed that the boat would start. Each second he expected a posse to invade the deck and find him and drag him forth. His fright was accented by comments of the drinkers on the robbery—Joaquin's visit took precedence over the fire as the latter was stopped after the hotel was destroyed.

"No man had a pistol or a knife on him when he passed through the door except that old goat of a mountain man," a voice declared. "That proves some one had the pistols inside, waiting for the Mexican ——."

"But if every one was searched how could any one carry 'em in?" some one inquired.

"It was that young cuss who lit out with Joaquin," insisted the first speaker. "And he didn't have any pistol or knife when he went in. Door-tender remembers he's the only man who told the truth when he said he was unarmed. But he opened the winder in the little room, and pistols was passed in to him. Joaquin was smart to pick a night when no one would be wearing pistols."

"If they could pass pistols through the window why didn't the robbers enter that way?" asked a Sacramento merchant. "Now I was there, and I figure it out this way. A woman carried the pistols in."

"—— me, pard! That sounds like book wisdom!" exclaimed the first speaker. "That's how it was played. The young feller who opened the winder got the pistols from the woman and had them ready for the robbers!"

Gilbert feared he would be recognized. He imagined men were casting curious glances at him; yet he did not dare leave the now garrulous Roger. Other male members of the troupe joined the two, so that one would get the impression the Easterner was a member of the company. At last the long white hundred-thousand-dollar craft—it cost the owners thirty thousand to send it from New York to the bay—began to vibrate. The crowd at the bar hurried on deck and the young man drew his first free breath. The electric telegraph was being discussed, but had not yet connected San Francisco with the outside towns. In Roger's company Gilbert watched the sights of this, the beginning of the two-hundred-mile journey. Barring accident they would reach Sacramento in ten hours.

Scarcely had the boat got under way than Gilbert's attention was held by a man in buckskin, standing well forward and leaning on a Hawkins rifle. He did not need to glimpse the bearded face to know it was the old mountain man. White locks were streaming from under the hat fashioned out of wild-cat's skin. In watching the man he saw nothing of beautiful Oakland across the bay. Old Misery remained motionless, ever staring to the northeast. There was no signs of the Mexican girl. Fearing the mountain man would turn about and recognize him, he retired to his cabin and lay down.

He experienced a rare fright when the boat made Benecia, twenty-five miles from the bay, and a detachment of soldiers from the military post came aboard. The soldiers, however, were not looking for fugitives and lost no time in dropping on the deck and going to sleep. They were bound for Fort Reading, far up the Sacramento. The boat proceeded. The little town, once the capital of the State, now the principal depot of commissary stores of the Department of the Pacific and containing the machine-shops of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, slipped astern.

On the south side of the straits insignificant Martinez, pleasantly situated with a background of low-rounded hills and still boasting redwoods despite the intrusion of sawmills, was unseen by the perturbed voyager. Not until the boat entered Suisun Bay did Gilbert venture to leave his cabin. He did not wander more than a twenty feet from it for fear of meeting the mountain man. But the latter remained in the bow, still staring toward the northeast. Gilbert was now convinced the Mexican girl Maria was keeping close in her cabin if aboard. He believed she had provided weapons for the bandits. His recollections were very clear in spots, much as a man emerges occasionally from a heavy fog long enough to get his bearings. From the moment the bandit leader laughed at him he recalled everything. And he suspected the fellow was near the monte table some time before his memory picked him up.

Yet Joaquin Murieta of the yellow-and-black serape was but a name to the Easterner. As men talked of his daring and bloody deeds Gilbert for the first time realized that securing gold from the ground was but a part of a miner's endeavor; there remained the task of conveying the treasure to an express-office. Ghastly stories of murdered men found on trails and in lonely cabins, over a range of five hundred miles, dropped into Gilbert's ears as the passengers strolled by his position. One man recalled how the governor's recent reward-offer had been found pinned to a murdered deputy-sheriff's shirt, with the outlaw's defiance added, to the effect:

> I myself will give ten thousand.—JOAQUIN.

From the odds and ends of gossip Gilbert began to build up a picture of the fellow. Joaquin was a fiend, reckless to the point of insanity and yet as cunning as a fox. His hunting-ground was described as extending from Shasta to Sonoma, from Nevada City and Marysville to Sacramento, through Livermore Pass near Martinez, throughout Mariposa and far south.

"He always keeps the Sacramento and the San Joaquin between him and the coast so he can't be cooped up," insisted one man.

"Yet he was in Frisco last night," reminded his companion.

From another group came the proud assertion:

"I seen him once. Blackest hair you ever see, and curly. Eyes black. Wore four dragoon revolvers, and always that yaller-and-black striped serape."

Other bandits were mentioned, Claudio of the Coast, John Irving and Salamon Pico, but all such, Gilbert gathered, were mere incidents of lawlessness when compared with Murieta. The latter was an institution. He wondered at being alive after being in contact with such a bloodthirsty creature.

"An' that Mex gal was Ana Benites, one of his gang," declared a miner.

Gilbert stole back to his cabin. Mention of the girl brought uppermost in his mind the ordeal confronting him once he reached Coloma. He must confess his sin and wait for the Vermont men to fix his punishment. Soul-sick, he took no interest in the changing scenes. Lying face down and feeding on his misery, he fell asleep.

It was late afternoon and hoarse commands were being shouted when he awoke. And he knew the long journey was ended. The bulk of the impatient passengers had swarmed ashore by the time he gained the deck. He saw nothing of the mountain man. He was glad to walk beside Lola Montez as she crossed the top of the eight-foot levee. He spoke to her. She was in a bad humor and treated him disdainfully. Roger, however, was amiably drunk and vowed he loved Gilbert as a brother.

Once clear of the levee, Gilbert slipped away from the theatrical people and followed a group of miners to a large hotel which proved to be the starting-point for the many stage-coaches. The framed houses, invariably painted white and trimmed with green, reminded him of New England and filled him with homesickness. He was surprized to find he was hungry and secured a seat at the second table and ate heartily. Then he went to bed.

At five o'clock in the morning the hotel was clamorous with activity. Hurriedly dressing and descending to the office, he learned he would have time to eat before the Coloma stage left if he "looked sharp." When he worked his way to the street it was to find the broad thoroughfare filled with four-horse coaches, drawn up four and five abreast. Each had its destination painted on the sides, and he commenced a frantic search for the one marked "Coloma."

He became confused and bewildered by the yelling and bawling of the drivers and the activity of the "runners" in dragging men to this or that vehicle. Then there was the persistency of groups ahead of him in turning back for "just one more," and the determination of those behind him in moving forward. Nor did the restless horses and the profane rivalry of the hostlers tend to clarify his wits. Yet there was no difficulty in finding any coach did a man ignore the commotion and use his eyes.

From the welter of discordant sounds emerged a heavy voice crying:

"Coloma! Who's bound for Coloma? Only two seats left. Step smart!"

Gilbert frantically plunged toward the voice and collided with a man turning back for a parting dram.

Then he was violently seized by a man who yelled in his ear:

"Placerville, called Hangtown! Take you there in five hours (the running time was eight). One seat left!"

"No! No!" Gilbert told him. "I want——"

"Ho, Joey! Gent bound for your place!" bawled the "runner;" and he clung to Gilbert until a husky fellow had fought his way through the crowd to relieve him.

"I'm going to Coloma," Gilbert informed him.

This runner smelled strongly of morning whisky, and his eyes were inclined to roll. Yet his manner was assuring and his smile benevolent as he seized Gilbert's carpet-bag and forcibly rammed him along between two lines of impatient coaches.

"I'm going—" began Gilbert.

"All right, pard. We can book you to —— 'n' back 'fore you can tell it," heartily boomed the runner. "We'll put you through —— fluking. Got the best driver in the world. Yuba Bill. ——! But can't he handle the ribbons!"

And he dropped the bag and all but hurled Gilbert in the middle seat of the huge, high-hung coach. Gilbert landed heavily, and his bag shot up into his lap. A big man clambered in and pushed him away from the side. Another man entered from the other side. Wedged firmly between the two, his blanket-roll and bag on his knees, Gilbert was still marveling at the expeditious fashion of filling a coach when the coaches ahead began to move.

Then all were in motion. Drivers cracked their whips and swore explosively at the leaders and took homicidal chances of running down the scurrying hostlers. Passengers whooped joyously. For half a mile the mad pell-mell continued; then the procession began to break up as the coaches turned off in different directions. Finally Gilbert's conveyance had the road to itself.

It was his first sight of California away from a town. He missed the fences and walls and ditches and low farmhouses of Vermont. It was a strange world, and he would have been exhilarated by the illimitable stretches of plain and undulating hills if not for the realization that every speeding mile was taking him that much nearer to the climax of his shame.

A low, soft laugh behind him interrupted his dismal brooding. He managed to twist his head. There was no mistaking her although the evening gown of lace was replaced by a prim white blouse and brown skirt. A soft white hat surmounted the coils of black hair. Nor was there any mistaking the old man asleep at her side, his dark-veined hands clutching the barrel of a Hawkins rifle held upright between his knees.

"You?" mumbled Gilbert. "You're going to Coloma, too?"

Her white teeth showed, and she shook her head and murmured—

"No more than you go to Coloma, *señor*."

"I'm going there," he fiercely muttered.

She stared at him in bewilderment for a few seconds, then softly asked—

"How can *señor* go to Coloma this way?"

"Doesn't the driver know the road?" he impatiently replied.

The girl appeared to be stupid.

"*Sí*. But this is the stage for Nevada City."

"Hi, driver! Stop! I must get out!" he cried, trying to rise.

Ceasing her silent laughter, she leaned forward and hissed in his ear:

"Keep still. One can always go to Coloma. But Nevada City! All the gold in the world is around it!"

"Huh?" bawled the driver, beginning to rein in. "What's the —— row in there?"

"Never mind, Yuba. It is all right," shrilly called back the girl. "A ver' great *caballero* would ride faster."

CHAPTER II

MR. PETERS TO THE RESCUE

MR. PETERS, gambler but no stoic, stood at the end of the bar in the largest gambling resort in Nevada City and shuffled a handful of double-eagles as a man shuffles cards. He was waiting to keep an important appointment with some of the profession from Marysville and was filling in the time with a desultory conversation with the head bartender. As he talked and listened he idly watched the groups about the different games.

Personally he cared only for poker and faro. He was portly of build, and, although a wicked derringer was in each waistcoat pocket, there was nothing of the gambling man in either his appearance or bearing. His round face beamed with genuine good-nature. That he was a citizen of some eminence in the community was testified to by the bartender's eagerness to draw a fresh glass of lager without being requested to do so. He was proud to be the recipient of any remarks Mr. Peters might be so good as to utter.

"And so Old Misery has fetched that young gal back," murmured the drink-mixer as Mr. Peters rested his elbows on the bar and watched Phelps, a Grass Valley millionaire and looking a beggar in his ragged attire and ruin of a hat, methodically stake small sums at roulette.

"Uh huh. Brought her back. Girl's all right. Little wild, like a young colt, that's all. Her grandfather, old Miguel, must be the —— to live with. Don't blame her for cutting loose once in a while. Misery found her in a gambling place. Of course she had no business there."

"Is it true about Old Misery killing one of Murieta's men?"

"True as the deuce is a low card. Plumb between the eyes. Scar-Faced Luis. When's Misery going back to camp?"

"Tomorrow, he 'lows. Told the girl to start in the morning. He's on a little spree. Claimed in here the trip to the bay broke up the one he had started on after selling the last bear."

"Heard some one saying he threatened a man who made talk about Bill Williams," lazily prompted Mr. Peters.

"It was a greenhorn. When he saw Bill coming he yanks out a Allen pepper-box and let on he was about to shoot. Misery pulled his butcher knife and promised to split his heart at thirty feet. Greenhorn ran."

"Coroner has held an Allen isn't a deadly weapon," mused Mr. Peters with a yawn. "Any one who'd hurt Bill Williams ought to be carved. Bill's clever's a kitten. Still there's always the chance of a stranger not understanding him. I've told Misery he ought to quit fetching him down here. I'm glad he fetched Maria back."

"If old Miguel don't beat her again."

Mr. Peters shrugged his broad shoulders and assured the other:

"He won't do it again. Old Misery told him words he'll always remember."

Their conversation was interrupted by a drunken sailor bursting through the doorway and with wide steps bearing down on the bar. His weathered face and scant locks suggested many years on the deep. But his eyes, focused on the bar, were young and lively with anticipation.

In order not to shift his course he rumbled to Mr. Peters:

"Avast there, mate. Plenty of anchorage. Don't foul my hawser."

The bartender eyed him stonily.

Mr. Peters smiled indulgently, and reminded him:

"No more, Ben. You know Weymouth Mass has passed word you've had enough. Two weeks of it now."

But Ben was very determined; and from the gaze cast back at the door it was plain he feared pursuit.

Scowling ferociously at the bartender and fumbling awkwardly for his sheath knife, he growled—

"Dish up the grog, or you'll be drifting astern."

Mr. Peters laughed softly and warned him:

"Here comes Weymouth to give you your needings. I don't know what he'll do when he learns rum makes you blood-hungry."

"—— and blue water, mate! Don't tell him," the sailor earnestly begged of the bartender.

The man taking long strides down the room stood several inches over six feet and wore a huge beard that reached to his belt. Sailor Ben hung his head like a child caught at pantry-sweets.

The newcomer, originally known by another name but now dubbed "Weymouth Mass" because of an early habit of boasting that the second oldest town in Massachusetts was his birthplace, clamped a mighty hand on the old sailor's shoulder and in a deep bass rebuked him:

"It won't do, Ben, and you know it. You know it's time for you to stand a four weeks' watch on deck. You know you've got to begin now. Why dread it? No more liquor, or you'll be called forward." Then to the gambler:

"Lawd! But he's an awful trial, Mr. Peters. His watch below, as he calls it was up yesterday. And here he is ravin' 'round after more rum. Two weeks and one day ago he came down here and went to a slop-shop and bought a new outfit, as he always does when he starts in on a spree."

The sailor glanced down at his stained clothes and apologetically explained:

"Always like to start that way. Makes me feel I'm just ashore from a long cruise."

"He wastes my dust to get drunk on," berated Weymouth Mass. To the bartender—

"He can have just one glass of beer to wash out his throat."

"Any luck the last trip?" inquired Mr. Peters, amusedly watching the sailor struggle between the desire to bolt the beer and blurred reason's urging that he make it last.

The miner glanced about to make sure there were no eavesdroppers and confidentially whispered:

"I believe we were on the track of the mother-lode when Ben ran away and bought his outfit. I chased him way to Marysville where he was finishing his watch below deck. Tomorrow I'll take him up to Old Misery's place and get him in trim."

"I signed, sir, on terms of a month on deck and no grog, and two weeks below with grog," sullenly reminded Ben.

"Silence, you graceless dog!" roared Weymouth Mass. "You've a day over the limit."

Dropping his voice he continued to Mr. Peters: "Every one knows a Dutchman is lucky. Of course everyone knows a sailor's lucky; luckier'n a Dutchman. Luckier'n a fool, even."

"Of course," readily agreed the gambler.

"And that an old sailor, drunk, is luckier'n anything on two legs."

"Draw to it every time!" heartily agreed Mr. Peters.

"And that's why I say I must strike it rich some time and make enough to return to Weymouth, Massachusetts, and for Ben to drink himself to death. Sometimes I think Old Misery don't put much stock in Ben's luck."

"Oh, he must," insisted Mr. Peters. "They say he's whooping it up again."

"Only for a day. Came down and sold a bear and started in, then had to quit to go to the bay. He's just licking up a few drinks he overlooked by going away. There's a man who knows how to handle liquor."

"He can handle a lot of it," admiringly declared the gambler.

The bartender nodded violently.

"What's the news from Marysville?"

"Word come there's more murders up Bidwell's Bar way. They say Joaquin did the job. Two men was noosed with a rope and dragged off their hosses and killed. That's greaser style."

Mr. Peters looked very grave and muttered:

"Some day that Mexican will stop a large hunk of lead. More than a year of his deviltry now. We've had enough."

"That's about all I heard—was mighty busy chasing around after Ben. I did hear that a new play-actor woman, a Lola Montez, is coming to Marysville soon and will probably come here, or Grass Valley, and give a show."

"She's a humdinger!" muttered Mr. Peters.

Gilbert, hesitating in the doorway, glanced about the long room; then advanced toward the bar. His gaze was a bit wild and swung uneasily from side to side.

"Acts like somebody was chasing him," commented the miner as he took the sailor by the shoulder and dragged him from the bar. "I've got to get Ben to bed. Good luck."

"May you always fill your hand if it's stronger'n the other man's," heartily replied Mr. Peters.

Then he rested his elbows on the bar and watched the Easterner. Gilbert halted, discovered he was close to a monte table and with a little shudder edged away. He was jingling some coins in his pocket and seemed undecided as to what he would do. Mr. Peters' gaze became interested. He believed the young man might make a big winning.

A drunken old sailor was readily accepted as having the best luck in hunting gold. There were the three sober sailors who first worked Murderer's Bar and took out eleven pounds of gold a day; had they been half-seas over undoubtedly they would have taken out twenty. And this newcomer acted erratic enough to suggest a mental unbalance. Mr. Peters was a firm believer in the luck of an irresponsible man, especially if he were a greenhorn. Of course some friendly person should be near to drag him away when he was at the top of his winnings.

"That fellow's to cards what old Ben is to gold mines," he mused.

GILBERT was now lingering near the faro game. Mr. Peters endorsed his choice. It was his favorite bank game, and there was less chance for trickery in it than in monte. Besides, an American usually was the dealer. Mr. Peters was disappointed when Gilbert turned and approached the bar. Evidently the greenhorn lacked spirit and was not worth considering. In a low voice Gilbert called for a glass of beer. While it was being drawn he kept glancing at the tables.

"Believes he shouldn't lay a bet, but wants to like ——," mused the gambler, his opinion of the young man growing more favorable.

He was wrong in his conclusion. Instead of struggling against temptation to gamble Gilbert was striving to bring himself to the point where he would risk Joaquin's three hundred dollars of stolen gold in an effort to win back the money he had lost so foolishly at monte. But his experience in the El Dorado had so sickened his soul he could not bear to risk even chance money.

During the last forty-eight hours he had lived more than had his grandfather, still hale and hearty at ninety-three. And all the peaks of his experiences were very bitter to contemplate. Since arriving, an unwilling passenger, in Nevada City he had thought much of his home. The memories always terminated with him taking his lamp and going up to the low-ceilinged bed-room where hung a cardboard motto reading, "Waste not; want not." And what a woful waster he had been; a waster of other people's money. By accident he had taken the wrong stage; rather he had been shanghaied into it. He had seen nothing of the Mexican girl since leaving the stage, and he hoped he never would see her again. Nor did he care to meet again the dreadful old man who seemed to be her companion.

"I never dreamed of doing it," he muttered to his glass of beer, and unconscious of the portly man at his elbow.

Then he neglected his beer and once more wearily endeavored to rearrange his thoughts and discover *why* he had done it. He feared it was because Maria had made him think of the dark-complexioned girl back home, but he tried not to admit as much. And what would the Vermont girl think if she could know the company he had kept after landing in San Francisco! She was sure to learn much of it. Therein was the curse of living. He must tell the men in Coloma, and they would write back home. Doubtless they would refuse to believe he had spent so much time cooped up in the hotel. They were more likely to credit him with spending the days in wild dissipation.

"I'll never go back," he sighed.

Then quite fiercely—

"I simply can't go back after *that*."

He forgot the beer and turned away to stare at the tables. The sight of them sickened him; so many hideous monsters. Never again was he to risk a penny on a game of chance; only he did not know it. In fact, he was still striving to screw up his courage to the necessary pitch. But it couldn't be done on beer, and the thought of whisky gagged him.

From the rouge-et-noir game a monotonous voice was calling:

"Make your bets, gentlemen. The game is made — Five — Eleven — Seventeen — Twenty——"

He lost the other numbers, but with staccato clearness came the announcement—

"Red wins!"

"If he only had had the courage and had staked his three hundred on the red! He started abruptly for the door.

With a quickness and lightness of step never to be suspected in a man of his bulk Mr. Peters kept at his heels. A few feet from the door he placed a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Oh, my God!" gasped Gilbert, cringing beneath what he believed to be the hand of lynch-law.

Mr. Peters pushed him between red curtains and into a small room and thrust him into a chair. It was horribly reminiscent of the alcove in the El Dorado, and he glanced at the wall for heavy hangings concealing a window.

"None of that, youngster! I know the look," growled Mr. Peters.

"I wasn't thinking to do anything wrong," insisted Gilbert.

"You've made a fool of yourself. Probably lost your pile, and think you can get it back by jumping into Deer Crick," continued the gambler sternly. "Yes, that's what your game is, —— you! You haven't guts enough to use either a gun or a knife, but must go to cluttering up the crick and cause folks to lose time in fishing you out. You *will* gamble, and when you lose you *will* snuff out your candle and leave us decent men to pay for burying you and spend time writing lying letters home to make them think you was killed by a cave-in or by Indians."

"I've got to do something harder than dying," protested Gilbert. "But it never would have happened if the sign hadn't said it was a masquerade and that no weapons would be admitted."

Never before had he ever felt such a longing to confide at least a portion of his troubles in some one.

"It's true I helped him get away, but I didn't know who he was. Or I'd died first."

"Easy. Easy. Of course you didn't know," soothed the gambler, believing the young fellow's mind had snapped.

"I didn't even know what had happened until I heard men talking about it afterwards. The girl Maria may have known, but I didn't."

Mr. Peters gazed at him sharply.

"Maria? Red shoes and stockings? Uh huh. How does Maria figure in it?"

"It was at her table that I lost the money," explained Gilbert, rather surprized that the comfortable-looking stranger did not already know this.

He believed he already had mentioned losing the money.

"Of course. Quite so," said Mr. Peters, pursing his lips and inflating his round cheeks.

"I won a little, lost a little. Then I drank something. I don't know just how it all happened."

"The sleek young witch!" muttered Mr.

Peters. "And some fools say it doesn't pay the house to dress them rich and have them for dealers!"

"Then he got away. Then I took the wrong coach and find myself up here."

"Uh huh! Now it clears up," declared Mr. Peters. "But you listen keen; it ain't my place to keep a big game waiting while I stop idiots from jumping into Deer Crick. And I won't stand for it!"

"Lord, sir! I wasn't going to do that," cried Gilbert. "Not that I don't feel miserable enough; but I've made up my mind I must take my medicine. If it wasn't for that man getting away it would all be as simple as it is hard to do. You see, I was feeling lonely. The girl was dealing cards. I risked some money of my own as an excuse to talk with her. I lost it. Lost all of it. Then I lost part of the other money. I knew I must get it back. I lost all of it."

"They always do," sympathetically murmured Mr. Peters.

And for his own benefit—

"Well, I'll be ——!"

For he was finding the plot intricate to follow.

"But if I go to Coloma and tell the men what I've done, as I've intended to do right along, I'll have to admit I was in the El Dorado when the men got away. It'll be known I was there. I'll be taken back to the city and men will look at me and remember me. Then——"

He could not finish the terrible picture.

"Sounds like a Chinese theater," mumbled Mr. Peters.

"I was taking the money to men in Coloma. Men from my home State. Vermont."

"Uh huh. Found the road again." And the gambler's eyes quickened. "The Coloma men must be hunting for you and wanting their money."

"Not for some time, perhaps. The home folks got the money together and sent it in care of Wells, Fargo at San Francisco—I was to take it out to Coloma from San Francisco. The Coloma men won't know that I've landed. I came around South America."

"Then just what are you fretting about?"

"But I've got to hustle to Coloma and tell them what I've done. Then it'll be known I was in the El Dorado when the men got away. Folks in the city already believe I helped them. I didn't have a coin left when the men jumped through the window. The leader lost a small bag of gold, and I picked it up. I'm living out of it now."

And he groaned in misery.

"Well, I'll be cussed if you ain't scattered the deck all over the floor!" exclaimed Mr. Peters. "Who do you mean by the men who got away?"

"I don't know. One of them is called 'Joaquin,' " was the listless reply.

"Beautiful!" gasped Mr. Peters. "No wonder you're afraid of having your neck stretched. You've gambled away other folks' money and must change your name and play dead, or be hung for lending a hand to Murieta. See here, son. I'd 'lowed you was just crazy. Seems to me you've had about as much good luck as a deuce in a euchre deck. My name's Peters. I don't blab. Talk some more if you want to."

"I must go to Coloma at once and tell everything. I believe my courage will be up to it by tomorrow."

"Hold up! Don't overplay your hand before the draw!" sternly commanded Mr. Peters. "I heard Joaquin had robbed a faro bank and had escaped, but I'd heard nothing about any one helping him. You're either California's champion liar or its most unfortunate idiot."

"I'm not a liar. I'm crazy thinking about it. I came in here hoping I would dare to risk what money I have in trying to get back what I've lost. But I couldn't do it."

"Uh huh," drawled Mr. Peters, watching him through half-closed eyes.

Gilbert's face worked spasmodically for a moment; then he got a fresh grip on himself and bitterly continued:

"I can't dodge the truth. I'm a thief. Probably will be hung. If I'd only invested the money! That would have been a breach of trust, but it would have shown my good will. There was fourteen hundred dollars. All lost. If I'd only bought a mine!"

"By——! That's rich! Fourteen hundred. Buy a mine. Never mind that now, sonny. You simply lost at a Frisco table instead of in a patch of rocks. The girl asked you to try your luck, I s'pose?"

"I didn't have to play," muttered Gilbert. "She was running the game. That was her business. I knew that when I bet. Looked like one of the Walker girls back home—the dark one."

"Of course. I understand."

"They gave away some kind of wine. It made me feel good for a while. Seemed as if I owned the whole world."

"The young witch cold-decked you! And many ships at sea are bringing thousands to the bay to learn by the same experience," sighed Mr. Peters. "Why, sonny, if I wasn't an honest gambler I could make my fortune. Never heard of Joaquin Murieta before landing in Frisco?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"I only heard what men in the street said and what they said on the boat. Back East we don't get much news except that every one is finding gold."

"Never even heard of Joaquin Murieta back East!" helplessly repeated Mr. Peters; and his fleshy cheeks expanded like toy balloons. "Sonny, you've made me believe the world's a lot bigger than I ever thought it was."

Then he frowned heavily and drummed his fat fingers on the table.

"Wait a minute," he growled. "Let's glance over your cards. You're in for a heap of trouble if you don't lay low for a while. It won't do the Coloma men any good if you get hung. Nevada City is no place for you. By this time men are searching the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys for the young fellow who helped Joaquin to escape. They'll be up here, nosing around.

"In a few months, maybe less, after several new crowds have swarmed up from Frisco, and several old crowds from the mines have swarmed down to Frisco, you'll be all right. The Coloma men can wait. They'll learn you got the money from the express office, and they'll think you got tapped on the head. You've got to drop out of sight for a bit. Now I have a friend who has a camp in the foot-hills. Queer cuss, but all right. I'll see if he'll take you along. I'll have to tell him everything; but he's to be trusted.

"If he says 'yes' you can go with him and get your nerve back, grow some whiskers, hunt for gold and try to make up the money you lost. You're too much of a —— fool to be wicked, and it won't help any one if you're hung. I'll stake you for an outfit if you lack money."

"I bought an outfit before I gambled. And I have some of the money left that that man—Joaquin—dropped. Thank you just as much."

"All right. It's a pity you didn't kill that fellow instead of showing him the window. It would have put several times your losses back in your pocket. Where's your traps?"

"Hótel de Paris. Haven't been there since I left them. Drunken man threatened me with a knife."

"You've had it exciting. Get your belongings and come back here. There's a lodging-house in back. I'll speak to Kelly and have a bunk held for you. Entrance is the door around the corner. If I can find my friend I'll drop in and look you up so you can meet him tonight. There's a big game on I'm afraid I'll have to miss——"

"I'm sorry to bother you——"

"Cut the cards!" growled the gambler. "This country is made up in part of men from the East; and you come from mighty far off. Pennsylvania's my home. And let me tell you this for your own good: Outside of chopping trees, building cabins, using their long rifles, the Pikes are about the numbest lot we have. The Isthmus or Horn trip is s'posed to rub the corners off a man and educate him. Folks from Pike County come straight across the plains and miss that sort of an education. This is the idea: You place all you can raise on one bet, that for pure ignorance of life out here you beat any Pike greenhorn who ever came over the ridge. What you need, son, is to go to school to experience and try to learn something."

"I'm sure you're right," humbly agreed Gilbert.

"Then maybe there's a chance for you, son. If my friend won't take you along—and he's got quite a queer collection as it is—we'll have to plan something else. We must pick out something that ain't too public. If ever you do make a big strike and *must* gamble, come to me. That'll be keeping it among friends."

Chuckling over this amiable invitation, Mr. Peters rose and swept back the curtains. Instead of looking for his Marysville rivals he went outside with Gilbert and walked much of the way to the Hótel de Paris, then turned off to conduct his search.

THE town surpassed Marysville, thirty-five miles down the river, in gaiety and wealth. The narrow ridge between the south and middle forks of the Yuba was one of the richest mining districts in the State, and the town was the center for many thousands of miners. Confidence in quartz-mining was reviving and men were beginning to talk "ledges" instead of "ounce-diggings."

All California had commenced with the pan in seeking treasure. Progress had been rapid; first to the "rocker" stage, four times cheaper than the pan; then to the "long-tom," four times more efficient than the rocker. The third step had been the permanent sluice, three times cheaper than the tom. Now as a crowning achievement the hydraulic process had been invented in this year of young Gilbert's troubles. By this method the cost of extracting gold was to be reduced from several dollars to a cent or less for each cubic yard.

Quartz mills were still in need of great improvements, but men of vision were now convinced that quartz must constitute the last era of mining. The first experience had been bitter, as rock assaying twenty-five cents a pound yielded, when crushed, only two or three cents, due to inability to save all the gold. And the cost of reduction was from forty to fifty dollars a ton. Ledge men were now boasting the work could be done for from six to fifteen dollars a ton as the outside figure

Mr. Peters, serene of visage, swiftly threaded his way through the gaping groups of Pike County men, by chattering, gregarious Frenchmen, affably nodded greetings to fresh-shaven men in stove-pipe hats, and all the time sought to find some trace of his friend. He depended more on his ears than his eyes. He would pause a few moments before a drinking place or gambling-hall, then shake his head and pass on without bothering to glance inside.

After covering Main, Broad and Kiota streets he swung back to Kelly's, thinking his friend might have entered the gambling-hall during his absence. He paused at the door and listened but did not enter. Deciding his quest was useless for the night, he turned the corner and entered the lodging-room to inform Gilbert the search would be resumed in the morning.

The young man had not retired but was surrounded by a dozen miners, each plastered with dried white mud from eye-brows to heels. Mr. Peters frowned and kept back; then regained his usual amiable expression as he observed his new acquaintance was not being taken into custody. And as he listened he smiled wearily.

"Now just one more peek at that, friend," pleaded one of the men. "What did you say you called it?"

"It's the Norwegian telescope," patiently explained Gilbert. "You can look through it and study the bottom of rivers and see if any gold is there."

"My——! If that ain't grand and noble!" exclaimed the miner, turning to the others.

They loudly seconded his praise of the worthless device.

"Feed me through a stamp-mill if he ain't heeled the best for finding gold of any man that ever come to Deer Crick!" loudly cried Phelps, the Grass Valley millionaire. "Cleverer than——!"

"He's shrewd. He's keen," added a third man. "Think of his blowing in here and having such a contraption! Rest of us never had sense enough to dream there was such a thing. What he ought to do is to get a charter and rent that telescope out. Charge so much a ton for every ton of gold raked off the river bottom."

"You fellers just hold your hosses," commanded the first speaker. "Now, friend, just show the boys the other inventions." Then in a loud whisper to the gaping circle:

"This young feller will corner all the gold on the ridge. He's got some of the dadderndest riggings you ever see."

"He can't beat that telescope. That's the meat for me," cried Phelps.

He insisted on examining it once more.

Gilbert reached in his blanket-roll and pulled out what looked to be a small kettle.

"——! Now what's that?" bawled a red-headed man.

"A dirt-boiling machine," explained Gilbert.

"By Judas! If that ain't the neatest 'rangement I ever saw!" bellowed a Georgia man, one of the few pioneers who knew anything about gold-mining when the first great rush was composed largely of greenhorns.

In a hushed voice he continued:

"Just think of it, boys! All he has to do when he finds pay dirt is to boil it—and there's only the gold left, pure and solid! Lawdy! But I wish I had one of them! Wish I could *afford* one of them! Any more miracles, partner?"

"Only my gold-magnet," replied Gilbert, fumbling in his blankets. "The merchant wanted me to buy lots of things, but I picked out what I believed to be the three best."

"If you can beat that dirt-boiler you must have a hornswoggler!" cried the Georgia man.

"If he can beat that river-telescope then

I can fly like an eagle," declared the red headed man.

Gilbert held up a small object about two inches square. The circle contracted and loudly marveled and begged permission to examine it. As it passed from hand to hand it was made the recipient of hushed encomiums. Gilbert was requested to explain just how it worked, the Georgia man laboring under the impression it was worn on the brow like a diadem.

He gratified them by placing it over his heart and informing them:

"The man said I was to wear it here, next to my skin. It detects gold. When I walk over a spot containing gold it gives me a mild shock."

"Well, I'll be ——!" ejaculated an Ohio man.

A man from Rhode Island passionately vowed he would have one like it if he had to crawl on his hands and knees to Frisco and sell his claim to buy it.

Phelps, of Grass Valley, hoarsely insisted it was too precious to belong to any one man as its ownership would permit the lucky owner to locate all the gold in California before any one else could get a smell. He urged that a company be formed on the spot and the magnet be bought on a royalty basis.

"If we can arrange it that way I'll sell my ledge for what I can get and take the next boat home," he concluded.

Mr. Peters, whose silent laughter had brought tears to his eyes, now began to wonder how he could rescue a greenhorn who was stamping himself thoroughly on the memory of every man in the circle of fun-makers. By morning Gilbert would be the butt of the town and one of the best known men on Deer Creek.

Pistol shots, followed by loud cries and cheers, and sounding close to the thin rear wall, permitted the gambler to effect a rescue. The circle broke up at the first explosion, some diving under bunks, others rushing toward the door. Then came a hoarse voice shouting something unintelligible.

Mr. Peters exclaimed—

"That's him at last!"

The men under the bunks reappeared and the Georgia man shouted—

"It's him, and there's fun going on outside!"

"Old Misery, or I'm a liar!" delightedly yelped Phelps. "He's in the theater next door."

The men rushed through the exit.

Gilbert saw the gambler for the first time.

Before he could speak Mr. Peters was sternly commanding:

"Throw that——stuff away. Don't show it again. Don't call attention to yourself again. Come with me. My friend is next door."

Astounded to hear his San Francisco purchases so brutally condemned, Gilbert replaced them in the blankets and hastened after his new friend, his mind in a whirl. There was a small riot at the entrance of the play-house as a dozen men endeavored to enter without bothering to buy tickets. Mr. Peters knew the man at the door, slipped a coin into his hand and ushered Gilbert inside while the others shifted their attention to the ticket window. Several employees of the theater were being shooed from the stage and down the aisles by a score of mud-spattered men.

In the act of climbing on to the stage was Old Misery, his white hair and beard somewhat tousled. As he gained the stage he sounded a terrific whoop. He had interrupted an act by a troupe of Chinese jugglers and knife-throwers. Five men were huddled at the left of the stage. At the other end, standing spread-eagle against a stout wall of planks, was a little dried-up celestial. Several knives were sticking into the planks a foot or more from his emaciated body.

"*Kola, wanmayanka yo!*"* shouted the mountain man. "I have had a war-dream. Where are the men to sit at the drum? *He-hi-hi-hi!* Where are the men at the drum?"

The enthusiastic audience now understood his desire, and a man in the front row bawled back:

"We're here at the drum, old hoss. Let her flicker!"

And he began to stamp his feet and others did likewise. The mountain man began a Northern war-dance, exclaiming at short intervals, "*How-how-how!*" This appealed to the humor of the audience, and they answered in kind. Suddenly the mountain man ceased his stamping and posturing and whirled on the frightened Chinamen and began passing them down from the stage. The little man against the planking remained motionless, his eyes closed.

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*"Friends, behold me." Teton Sioux.

With the stage cleared behind him the mountain man announced:

"I'll show you some knife-heaving what *is* heaving. Toss up your knives, you hellions!"

With howls of delight the spectators responded, led by a Pike County man whose bowie-knife had a home-made wooden handle. It was followed by a similar weapon having the handle ornate with silver, contributed by a Mexican-Chinese man who was hoping to see blood flow. Other knives sailed to the stage, endangering the mountain man. As they fell Old Misery gathered them up, oblivious to those passing close to his head. And as he stooped and secured the knives he repeatedly cautioned the little Chinaman to remain as he was.

The little man was either very brave or too frightened to move; for he maintained his position, his legs straddling far apart, his arms outstretched. Old Misery emitted another whoop and leaped nimbly back till the full width of the stage was between him and the target.

In the wings was a table covered with a dragon-decorated cloth.

On this the assortment of knives were dumped, and the mountain man yelled:

"I've had a war-dream! I've dreamed of four bears and a hawk! I'm more red'n white. I carry a sacred owl pack. I've fought Blackfeet and lived with the Crows and Chippewas. *He-hi-hi-hi.* Give me more drums! I've seen the white-haired raven. I've sung the Arrow-Song."

He added half a dozen boasts in as many Indian tongues; then snapped back his arm. Gilbert winced and cried aloud as a heavy blade spun to the planking and stood deeply embedded within two inches of the target's left side.

A thundering shout rewarded the cast. Then the house became very quiet.

The mountain man cried—

"Watch me shave him close!"

The deafening applause was renewed as the mountain man threw the knives so rapidly that it seemed as if there were an endless stream of them glittering across the stage. And a hedge of steel crept up from the right foot and along the leg, and above and below the outstretched arm. When the silver-handled knife sank snugly beside the yellow throat there was a general gasp of delicious doubt.

"A hundred dollars he draws blood!" cried Phelps, of Grass Valley.

"Take you! Make if five hundred!" snapped Mr. Peters.

"Five hundred it is!"

The sporting possibilities of the target being wounded or killed appealed to others; and as Old Misery turned back to the table for more knives bets were made fast and furious. But no blood was drawn. With his heart at a standstill Gilbert watched the hedge encircle the uptilted head and creep down the left side.

As he cast the last blade the mountain man leaped high in the air and cracked his moccasins together three times, sounded his war-whoop, and shouted—

"Now you've seen some real knife-heaving."

He leaped across the stage and began plucking the blades from the planking and tossing them to the footlights, each striking point downward, until they stood in a long row.

"Pick out your own weepins," he invited.

Then drawing a bag from the bosom of his fringed-buckskin shirt, he placed the little Chinaman's hands together, filled them with gold and leaped from the stage.

"If he can do that when on a spree what couldn't he do when he's sober?" groaned Phelps of Grass Valley as he paid his wager to Mr. Peters.

"We must go," huskily whispered Gilbert. "I don't want to meet that man."

"You young fool, he won't hurt you. That's my friend; the old mountain man I quit a big game to find," growled Mr. Peters.

"No! No! I can't meet him!" cried Gilbert. "He's the man with the big bear! He said he would cut my heart out!"

CHAPTER III

OLD MISERY

DESPITE his sense of guilt, and his fear of being tracked, Gilbert could not resist the optimism of the wonderful morning. As he rolled his blankets and shamefacedly threw his telescope and magnet and dirt-boiler to one side Phelps, of Grass Valley, finished his toilette by running his fingers through his hair and whiskers, and cordially greeted—

"Well, how's our young 'Ounce-Diggings' this morning?"

"Not quite so much of a fool as last

night," politely answered Gilbert. "Mr. Peters dressed me down for buying that rubbish."

Phelps grinned and encouraged him:

"You're improving. Most of us went through it. Last year some of us old miners chipped in forty thousand dollars to build a gold-baker, got up by an Eastern cuss. Shares was ten dollars each. It was a furnace and he figured on melting all the rock away and leaving the pure gold. Not much better than your marvelous dirt-boiler. And lots of men older'n you bought a boiler. Now what you going to do?"

"Work."

"Good. You can work for me on my ledge. Found a rich ledge in Grass Valley three years ago. Till this season it cost more to get the gold out than the gold would fetch. But new methods make it a rich proposition. Other fellows got tired and discouraged and sold their ledges for a song. I've just held on to mine and put in my time hydraulicking and sluicing till some one come along with brains enough to show how a ledge should be worked. Now things are going to boom and I can use an honest young man at tip-top wages."

"I've as good as made a deal with an old man who lives in the mountains. That is, I've said I would go if he would take me. He has a funny name: Old Misery. I'm to meet him this morning. Probably will go with him today."

"All right. He's a bear-hunter. Lived all his live among Injuns. I don't think you'll git rich working with him, but that's your business. If you ever want to try mining just ask for Phelps, of Grass Valley. Four miles southwest of here."

The Rhode Island man and the Georgia man turned out from their bunks and spoke pleasantly.

The former grinned cavernously and advised:

"Don't feel cut up over the telescope. Lots of them sold couple of years back. I came out early in Fifty. *I* bought a *diving-suit.*"

"I went in on the rock-melter with Phelps," chuckled a voice from an upper bunk. "And on the side I paid a lazy Dutchman fat wages for a month to locate gold with a forked stick."

"I'm prospecting down Coloma way, young man," spoke up the Georgia man. "They say the diggings down there are played out, but that's 'cause they don't know where to look. You're simple enough to be honest. Want to come along?"

Gilbert considered himself a thief, and he knew it would be unsafe to venture near Coloma. He repeated his intentions of going up into the hills if Old Misery would take him. He could see his decision lessened him in their esteem, and, tying his blankets and taking his bag, he hurried from the bunkhouse to find the mountain man.

While looking for Old Misery he found time to satisfy his timber-loving soul and gazed long at the stumps of huge sugar-pines dotting the slope of the ravine. The magnificent trees had been slaughtered within a brief space of time. In the east, however, ridge after ridge of heavily timbered country climbed high to find the Sierra. In the far background stretched the pale-blue peaks, separating California from the Great Basin.

The streets were humming with life, and the fear of yesterday seized upon him as he mingled with the drifting crowds. There was every chance, he told himself, that he had been traced to Sacramento. If that were a fact then the rough and ready upholders of the law would surely press their quest to Marysville and Nevada City.

"Go back to bed, Señor Stupid, and wake up," greeted a bird-like voice.

It was Maria of the dreadful escapade. She was seated on a mule and leading a pack-animal. Much red stockings and the edge of a red petticoat showed below the brown skirt, and small red shoes were drumming lightly against the mule's ribs. Her lips were scarlet, and her dark cheeks were flushed. He wondered that she could be so smiling after passing through such a terrible experience.

"Good morning, Miss Maria," he coldly replied. "You're going away?"

"*Señor Comandante* forgives my running away to the ceety. I go to meet my dreadful grandfather," she lightly replied. "We may meet again. *Quien sabe?*"

Gilbert did not wish to see her again. But as she knew about his predicament and seemed to be worldly-wise he desired to secure some benefit from the chance meeting.

In a low voice he asked—

"Do you think there is any danger?"

"Pouf! What does Maria care for danger? It is living without danger that makes the heart grow tired," she scornfully replied.

"*Americanos* hanged a woman of my people at Downieville, but they never will hang Maria."

"I hope not," he muttered. "But they may hang *me*."

This appeared to appeal to her sense of the humorous, for she laughed much.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she exclaimed. "To think the great Joaquin should be helped by a gringo jus' landed at the bay! I wake in the night and laugh."

"Hush! Not so loud with names," he hoarsely cautioned.

Her eyes became two flints and she shrilly asked—

"Who are you to tell Maria how she shall talk?"

"I'm a greenhorn," he mumbled. "Just a fool; one who heard men say the girl in the El Dorado was Ana Benites, one of——"

"*Nombre de Dios!* What do you say?" she hissed. Then gravely: "You speak much wisdom, Señor Gilbert. Names should be whispered. The danger for you, *señor*, showed its claws when you boarded the Sacramento boat. Men were there watching for the young man who opened a window. But on the boat they thought you were one of the people with that cat of a Montez woman. The danger is not over. But keep the heart high, *señor*. The great man does not forget one who has served him even if that man be a gringo."

"God forbid I should ever see him again!" shuddered Gilbert.

"Is it so?" her low voice fiercely demanded, and she rested her slender brown hands on her hips and stared at him wrathfully. "You push aside the good will of a great man?"

Anger gave place to hero-worship in her small face. More quietly she continued:

"Your people cheated Mexico out of this country. Your Colonel Walker goes to steal Sonora. Your people drive my people from good claims. They keel them if they do not go. But they do not drive Joaquin Murieta!"

The last in a hissing whisper with her head thrust forward and close to his face. Then she was showing her white teeth in a smile and nodding gaily, and prophesying:

"You may meet him again. *¿Quien sabe?* He rides far. He rides where he will."

"No! No!" he mumbled. "I'm sweating blood. Meeting him once has spoiled my life. I can not even work and pay back what I gambled away."

"Stole," she corrected with a little sneer. "Why not steal again and pay. Every one steals out here except *Señor Comandante*. Men fight to get into office in San Francisco so they can steal. My old grandfather wore cloth over his face when his eyes were good. 'Stealing' is one name for many ways of taking what you want."

Then she was laughing again and patting the bosom of her white blouse and confiding:

"The great man is blamed for all the gold the El Dorado lost that night. But I could not go with my pay. I had no time to count. My bad grandfather will say I am a good girl to bring gold to him. I tell you this for we, as you *Americanos* say, are in the same boat. Is it not? *Sí*."

Gilbert stepped back as the Mexican-Chinese man came up. He was the same who had tossed a silver-mounted bowie-knife on to the stage the night before. He ignored Gilbert and spoke sharply in Spanish to the girl. She eyed him resentfully, yet appeared to be afraid of him, and made a short answer. He spoke again, only a few words; and she kicked her small heels against the mule and rode up the ridge path toward the foot-hills.

Turning to Gilbert and speaking in excellent English, the fellow remarked—

"It is good to have the rains over."

The speech was insignificant, but his gaze was persistent and curious.

Gilbert disliked him exceedingly and replying briefly, moved on to be rid of him. A short distance up the street he halted before a window containing a display of Chinese shawls and wondered if one of the Walker girls back home would care for one. Several Vermont men had returned home from California the season before and each had brought one or more of these shawls. Then came again the realization that he was done with Vermont once the Coloma men wrote home how he had been false to his trust, or had been killed after visiting the express office.

A Chinese girl, looking less than fourteen years of age and carrying an infant in a silk scarf on her back, quickly appeared in the doorway.

Pointing a tawny finger at the window, she said in a falsetto little voice—

"Velly good."

She was the first woman of her race Gilbert had seen at close range. She reminded him of a quaint doll. And yet there was ancient cunning in her small face and a curious suggestion of strength in the tawny fingers. He stared at her and then at the infant. On the head of the child was a black cap, gaily embroidered.

"Your child?" he found himself asking.

She laughed and nodded and again pointed at the shawls and repeated—

"Velly good."

The Mexican-Chinese man suddenly stood beside Gilbert and spoke in a strange singsong to the little creature. She bowed low and hastily withdrew inside the shop.

"My wife," explained the man with a shrug of his shoulders. "Sent over for Old Sam, who runs a wash-house. He wouldn't take her. Too young. So I bought her from him. If you're interested in the shawls I'll make the price almost nothing."

"Thank you. I'm not buying anything today," Gilbert told him.

"You're going away? I think that is wise. Of course the time to buy shawls is when you are going back home. I salute you, *señor*."

He entered the shop and Gilbert went on, puzzled by the man's bearing and speech.

NEAR the Hotel de Paris he met Old Misery.

The mountain man would have passed without noticing him had not Gilbert accosted him, explaining—

"I am the man Mr. Peters spoke to you about in the theater last night."

Old Misery ran a brown hand through his yellow-white beard and stared quizzically at the Vermonter and slowly replied:

"When I'm having a war-dream things looks brighter'n they do after I've slept it off. Mebbe you'll fit in with me, but I'm gambling Peters is betting t'other way. More I look at you the more you make me think of some one I wanted to climb while I was haunching up on my hind legs and making the eagle scream."

"You threatened to stick a long knife into me, sir, for being afraid of a big bear. The bear came toward me when I got out of the stage. I pulled my Allen revolver."

"We— Cuss me if it ain't so! You acted up like a Pike County man. If you'd pulled a real gun on Bill Williams I wouldn't 'a' been so fussed. But one of them pepper-boxes! It hurt Bill's finer feelings just like it did mine. Anyway, you've got guts 'nough to be honest. Never like a dodger. We'll trail down to the old stable where I leave Bill, and the three of us will have a pow-wow. I've got quite a lot of animals up in the hills. Some of the queerest have only two legs. And I'll lift ha'r to please Peters. But it's sort of straining friendship to shove a greenhorn on me who carries a pepper-box."

"That's what I told Mr. Peters, Mr. Misery. It was his idea. He meant well by me, and has been mighty kind. But I can see I'd only be in your way, Mr. Misery."

"Good land! Stop that 'mistering' me! If the boys heard you they'd nag the life out of me. *Old* Misery. I was called that when I worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Yerba Buena in forty-six, and when I worked for Jacob Leese afore he sold out to the Hudson's Bay. Always *Old* Misery. Back in the days when big ships was sailing where the busy part of Frisco now is. S'long as you can look every man in the face and tell him to go to —— you don't have to go a-mistering anybody."

"I can't look men in the face," was the low and bitter reply. "I've done things I shouldn't have done."

Old Misery stared at him blankly, then shrewdly; and confessed:

"Younker, so have I. But I never l'arned that being meeching ever helped undo anything. I was rampageously drunk last night. Oughter be ashamed of myself, seeing as how I had Bill Williams along. Howsomever, we'll save the talk till we can have Bill in at the pow-pow."

Gilbert was convinced he could not overcome the mountain man's prejudices; nor did he believe any discussion would favorably influence the whimsical character.

"I can get a job in the mines, although there are reasons why I should not just now."

"Along of doing things you didn't oughter," mused Old Misery. "If Peters said that he hit plumb center. And now let me tell you something about mining, where you work for yourself. A placer-miner that earns six hundred dollars a year is lucky. You hear of them that make a rich strike; but you don't know nothing about the thousands and thousands who don't make grub and liquor. Even as keen a man as 'Weymouth Mass'—friend of mine—ain't managed yet to hit the mark. And he come out in the first rush from the East. But I will say he's now got a big medicine working for him and oughter hit the bull's-eye. But the man who works steady for wages, here or at the bay, has the miner who ain't got any medicine beat all to pieces.

"If Peters didn't say you had good reasons for not doing a honest day's work—See here, younker: Bill Williams won't like that sort of talk a —— bit. He'd rare up on his hind legs and snort even if it was said in the sign language. Howsomever, Bill ain't no Gospel slinger. He's broad-minded, and he banks a heap on what Peters says. We'll put the whole business before him. But it's got to be a straight talk. Nothing held back."

"Mr. Peters said I was to tell you everything."

"His head is full of sense. We'll spread all the cards out before Bill. It's him that has the say-so. I'll chip in when it can help, being weak and mortal. But it's for Bill—who never done wrong—to decide."

Gilbert followed him, believing him to be crazy. But better the company of the mentally unbalanced than to be left alone with his fear that some man from the bay might tap him on the shoulder and tell him he was wanted. He was beginning to realize that Joaquin Murieta was no common evil-doer, and that public sentiment would be quick to bestow a noose on a man who helped him to escape. It was the height of the tragically ridiculous that a Vermont greenhorn, just arrived on the coast of gold, should be the one selected by fate to show the arch-outlaw the hidden window and to flee in his company as far as the street.

When they came to the stable, a dilapidated log and slab structure no longer used for horses, the mountain man directed:

"Wait out here. Bill 'n' me will be with you in the flap of a beaver's tail. Better to pow-wow in the open then inside walls."

He vanished through the dark doorway, and Gilbert sat down and became interested in an eighteen months' old grizzly bear, weighing some five hundred pounds. The bear was hitched to a broken wagon by a long chain, and, being well-fed, was thoroughly good-natured and beautiful of coat. A man passing by the front of the building paused to fondle him roughly. After the man went on the bear advanced to make friends with Gilbert. Reassured by what he had seen, Gilbert scratched the bear behind the ears and petted him.

For some minutes the two were excellent companions; then a pig squealed back of a pen adjoining the stable. The bear quickly padded back to the wagon and crawled beneath it. The pig wriggled through an opening and stood gazing foolishly about, unable to decide just what use he should make of his new freedom. Like a cat watching a mouse the bear watched the pig. The pig grunted and advanced toward the bear's unfinished breakfast. The captive's legs began to twitch, and the muscles worked rapidly beneath the silky coat. Then the bear made a rush. The pig squealed demoniacally and barely scrambled out of reach of the swift, hooked paw.

"If the derned young fool had waited two seconds more he'd had him," cried Old Misery from the stable door. "Some of you shoo that pig away before Bill comes out. Bill's a gentleman, but he forgets that fact when he smells pork."

The pig was chased to the back of the stable; then Old Misery came forward, closely followed by the same immense bulk that had terrified Gilbert the day before. The grizzly's tail was shorter than his ears. His coat was brownish-yellow with white tips, and he was fat. The small eyes searched for a glimpse of the squealing pig, but he did not offer to leave his master. When the mountain man halted Gilbert drew his heels under him, ready to leap and run. The bear dropped on the warm earth, curled up and went to sleep.

Old Misery seated himself cross-legged and began:

"I see that young fool bear cottoning to you, younker. You had a trick with his ears that pleased him mightily. He's one of the cubs I sold last season. Sold another just before going to the bay; a female, older and full as big. She's to be took to Frisco. There must be a dozen bears down to the bay that I trapped. Gentleman behind me is Bill Williams. Named after an old partner of mine, who knew more about the Rocky Mountains than any one else 'cepting Jim Bridger 'n' me.

"Gineral Frémont says Williams lost his bearin's and come nigh busting up his outfit. But old mountain men will tell you that if the gineral had follered Bill's medicine he'd never tried to cross the mountains at the head of the Arkansas in Winter, and he wouldn't lost three men and his papers. We called him Old Bill Williams when Kit Carson, Uncle Dick Wooten and L. B. Maxwell was l'arning the mountain passes. Bill always believed he'd change into a buck elk, but said he would stick close to one of the Colorado parks.

"I ain't shot a buck elk in that neighborhood since he was wiped out by Injuns. So you can see I've give my four-footed pard a good name; and he's living up to it. Now that we're squatting we'll smoke and powwow." And he proceeded to fill his pipe and light it. "Bill's got his ears open even if he does play off at being asleep."

Gilbert doubted this last statement as he stared at the furry ball, nearly as high as when the animal was standing.

"He's tame," muttered Gilbert.

Old Misery lowered his pipe and snorted:

"If you was among the Crows you'd be their head medicine-man. Tame? He's civilized. He's a gentleman."

"Of course," hurriedly agreed Gilbert. "How did you happen to meet him?"

"After silk hats knocked the stuffing out of beaver prices and fetched the price down from ten dollers a pound to twenty-five cents apiece, I just wandered up and down the country. One day in Frisco, forty-nine, I went in and saw Rowe's circus. That give me the notion of trapping animals for the towns. Bill was one of the first I trapped. He was young and playful and raked me from the neck to crotch. He soon l'arned I couldn't stand as much fun as when I was younger, and now he's as well behaved as any Gospel-slinger you ever see. I've been offered eighteen hundred for him. Circus back East wanted him bad."

"And you refused!"

"Good ——! Would you sell your best friend for a bag of dust?" roared Old Misery, his frosty eyes glittering.

"The question was foolish. Of course you refused; for there's Bill. I was thinking you had the offer right after Bill was caught. Of course you wouldn't sell him after you got attached to him."

Only partly mollified, Old Misery growled:

"Yes, there's Bill. And he's gitting onpatient to hear you talk. You don't have to make a yip. But if you do talk, just remember you're speaking on pipes, and get started. Time's most up, ain't it, Bill?"

One small eye opened sleepily.

The mountain man's stern gaze promised no reward for a confession, but believing he could trust him and anxious to have it over with, Gilbert plunged into a narrative of his trials since leaving home. He remarked that he had been ill for much of the long voyage down the east Atlantic coast and for much of the time up the west coast of South America. He copied from Mr. Peters in reminding that he had landed in San Francisco more of a greenhorn than otherwise might have been expected. He shielded himself none, and when he had finished his face was red, and he found it hard to meet the boring gaze of the mountain man.

"So you're a Yankee, huh?" mumbled Old Misery. "That's 'gainst you to my way of thinking. To Bill's way of thinking, too. We never had no bad weather out here till the Yankees begin coming in. Never was such goings-on in weather as the rains of last Winter and the Winter before. My camp's high in the hills, but Bill 'n' me don't want to risk being washed out or snowed under along of having a Yankee with us. That your idee, Bill?"

The big bear stretched out his legs and wriggled his mass of flesh and then curled up again. Gilbert's eyes opened wide in amazement. Instead of being condemned for gambling away money that did not belong to him, and for helping the bandit king to escape, he was being mocked by this strange old man for being an Easterner. Later he would learn that many native Californians and mountain men entertained the quaint belief that the climate changed for the worse once far-Eastern men flocked in.

Before he could think of any defense to offer Old Misery was resuming—

"Bill says that there ain't a grizzly in the Sierra foot-hills, or around Shingletown, or McCumber's Flats above Fort Reading, or at Lassen's Butte, that doesn't know it's the Yankees that sent our old-time weather to ——."

"Well, that seems to finish it," muttered Gilbert.

"Don't be so cussed brash. I ain't passed the pipe yet. On t'other hand, Bill says, the weather'll be about as bad at camp if you stay down here hiding from a rope with a noose in it. He says the mischief's done already, and a few more Yanks can't make it any worser. Do I 'terpret you right, Bill?"

Mr. Williams laboriously rolled on his back and squirmed convulsively; then toppled over on his fat side and continued his nap.

Old Misery watched him admiringly and added:

"That's his way of thinking, he says. He won't change it if —— freezes over."

"I'm a thief," bitterly reminded Gilbert. "I'm wanted for helping a lawbreaker to escape. I expected those would be the things you—and Bill—would think about."

"Man's a thief who steals things for hisself when he don't need 'em," mused Old Misery. "A man who takes something for gambling outfit to put in its pouch is just a cussed fool."

"If they had an electric telegraph between San Francisco and Sacramento they would have had me by the time the stage reached the south side of this creek."

Old Misery snorted in disgust.

"Tel'graph outfit! Send a talk over a hank of wire! When they can do that Bill Williams will be wearing feathers. Don't talk foolishness. Minnetarees would say you was *mahopa*. Out of your head."

While he was indulging in this bit of skepticism the young bear bounced from the wagon and jumped on Bill Williams. The cylonic whirl of furry forms violently hurled the mountain man and Gilbert to one side.

Old Misery, on his hand and knees, informed Gilbert:

"Bill always likes to play a bit. T'other Bill I named him after was that way. Full of fun, 'specially when in liquor."

And with keen enjoyment he watched the unequally matched antagonists wrestle and cuff each other. Gilbert had the wind knocked from his lungs and was incapable of speech for some minutes. The bears were good-natured, however, and it was obvious that Bill was not exerting himself.

Old Misery crawled to his feet and gleefully exclaimed—

"See the old cuss let on he's plumb licked!"

This as Bill fell on his back and gave an excellent portrayal of the conquered.

"Well, now we've settled all that, we'll be hoofing it up to the hills," continued the mountain man. "I'll fetch 'Solid Comfort' and we'll start."

"But there's the money I lost and the man I helped——"

"Listen, younker," harshly cut in Old Misery. "Neither Bill Williams nor me has lost any gold dust, nor Murietae. Keep shet. See how big Bill has grow'd. That's along of not talking all the time. Owls live many years for the same reason."

With the springy step of youth he made for the stable, leaving Gilbert to wonder what particular sort of a pet he would bring back. When he reappeared he was carrying a rifle.

"Where's Solid Comfort?" asked Gilbert.

Misery patted the rifle, and countered:

"You don't carry no weepins. That's good."

"I still have my Allen's revolver in my blanket roll——"

"I was speaking of deadly weepins. After we git to camp I'll show you how to whittle so's I can trust you with a knife."

"Then I'm to go with you?"

"This is a free country, 'cept for Mexicans and Chinese. They was sorter overlooked when freedom was parceled out on this side of the Sierra."

He started off up the ridge road, his rifle over his arm, his head swinging from side to side as it would in the Indian country. The big bear plodded along at his heels, his head swinging from side to side. A rod behind came Gilbert, his blanket over his shoulder, his carpet-bag in hand, fearfully expecting some violent interruption to his going and not yet quite sure how far the strange old man would endure his company.

They left the town behind and had followed the creek as far as Willow Valley when the pounding of hoofs caused the mountain man to glance back and come to a halt.

A man was riding rapidly after them, and as he drew nearer Old Misery spat in disgust and exclaimed:

"Ching-a-ling. Breed of the worst kind. Calls himself 'Manuel Vesequio.' But to us old-timers he's Ching-a-ling, half-Mexican, t'other half Chinese. Some say he's a spy for Murieta. Likely 'nough. He's in a hustle, but he don't 'pear to be chased."

The breed reined in his horse some distance from the two men and covered the remaining distance on foot. He seemed to be in haste, and his yellowish-brown face reflected some suggestion of fear, as he glanced behind him. He told Old Misery:

"There is much running back and forth

of men in the town. They will come this way."

"Ching-a-ling, tell what's on your mind. Just why did you ride after us?" demanded the mountain man as he eyed the fellow with much disfavor.

"How should Manuel Vesequio know what men mean when they talk loud and run to get horses and point this way, Señor Misery?" was the sullen answer. "Perhaps they race their horses. Perhaps they ride after a man. Perhaps they ride after a young man. *Quien sabe?* Excuse, Señor Don Misery. The horse smells the bear very strong. I do not like to walk back to town. *Adios.*"

And before he could be questioned further he turned and ran back to his nervous mount, flung himself into the saddle, and galloped at breakneck speed down the creek.

"They're after me!" gasped Gilbert. "You go ahead. I'll take to the timber. They'll blame you if they find me with you."

"You're 'fraid Bill 'n' me will git hurt, huh? Solid Comfort will have a word to say afore that happens. But it's neighborly of you to have it in mind. We'll trail along and think about dodging trouble when Trouble shows hisself. Bill's already thinking 'bout it. Ching-a-ling's a spy for Joaquin, all right. Some one fetched him word to give you a warning."

"I don't want to be beholden to that man," muttered Gilbert as they quickened their pace.

"I never stop to think who's hauling on the rope that pulls me out of a hole," replied Old Misery. "They can't come up so quick that you won't have time to tree yourself. No use fretting."

TO BE CONTINUED

Slants on LIFE

Under the Skin

by Bill Adams

I HAD an experience yesterday that put the fear of God into me; and I guess I needed it.

There is a man in this little dinkey home-town of mine who is commonly regarded as about the limit in the matter of simplicity and plain stupidity. He works at a job that of all jobs takes less intelligence than any other, almost. I ought to know, for I did the same job once for some months—shoveling concrete. A strong back is all you need.

He is a quite uneducated, illiterate, dirty fellow, who drags his heels as though he could not, even were his feet to be shod in sudden satin, lift them merrily. He is a sort of abject object of what humanity may be—not much above a large hair-chested ape.

That is his reputation; and that is rather how I have been apt to look upon him.

Yesterday while I was about to cross the street I heard a soft and not unmusical voice say—

"Say, mister, w'ere kin I get some more o' that there writin'?"

And turning found this man addressing me.

The little weekly paper here saw fit to reprint that Camp-Fire stuff.

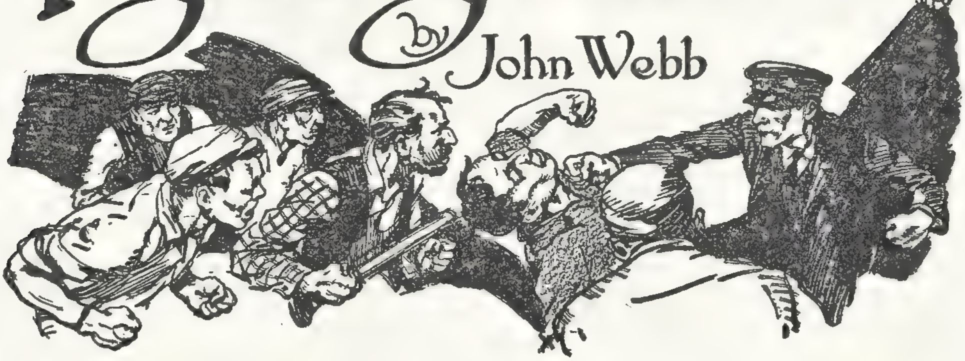
"You kin speak," he said. "I ain't never done no readin' nor no talkin', but you kin speak."

A man may have traveled ten times around the world, and watched the bright sun set upon a hundred gilded cathedral towers, and have seen the vale of Orotava, and the hill-tops of the sea in all their beauty; but—unless he has, in his far travels, learned that there lies a something hidden in the red heart of his brother man that is his for the asking—he had better have stayed at home, shoveling sand or forking manure with the poorest fellow in the countryside.

It is in the heart of a man that one finds the brightest jewel—not on a steep church tower, nor in the bottom of a diamond mine. And the heart of man is within the breast of each of us—a jewel waiting for the soft hand of a brother to polish it.

Fighting Men

by John Webb



Author of "Strong and Weak"

CARLSEN, the Swede boatswain of the *Hawk*, leaned over the hatch-combing of number two hatch and looked down into the 'tween-decks, where two men were hooking the end of a cargo fall in the ring of the strongback bridle.

"All right?" he asked.

There was an affirmative from below and the boatswain held out his hand and twirled his up-pointing thumb slowly, which, in the language of the sea, means, "take 'er up, easy." The fall tightened, strained, and then its swinging motion showed that the strongback was clear of its fastenings.

"All right!" Carlsen called. "Take 'er oop."

The man at the winch, a big, rough looking individual with a cross of adhesive plaster over one eye and a face marked by recent cuts and bruises which showed through his week's growth of sandy beard, nodded and opened the steam-valve to its full extent. The winch rumbled and the heavy iron strongback came swiftly up to above the main deck hatch-combing. The boatswain held up his hand, palm outward, to signify, "Stop."

"Das goot," he said. "Put on yer brake."

There was a grinding screech, a groan of protesting machinery and a light cloud of smoke rose from the charred wooden blocks of the brake-band and drifted off to leeward. The winchman, suddenly aware of his mistake, made a belated attempt to shut off the steam before the friction completely demolished the lining of the band.

Captain McGuire, who had been leaning over the rail of the captain's deck and attentively watching the preparation of the *Hawk* for port, straightened slowly and tossed away his brown paper cigaret. He moved to the ladder and went down, unhurriedly but in the manner of a man who has a definite object in view, then walked through the passage between the officers' quarters and into the well-deck, where the big seaman was ruefully inspecting the charred remains of the break-band lining. The captain advanced to the man and stood regarding him calmly, but with the smoldering look in his deep, black eyes that many a forecastle bully had learned to fear.

Mr. Tenny, the hypocritical little mate with the paternal manner, looked down from the forecastle-head and rubbed his thin hands together expectantly. The boatswain and two sailors, on the other side of the hatch in readiness to land the swinging strongback upon the deck, waited tensely.

At the captain's approach the big seaman turned and returned the calm stare defiantly.

"Well, it wusn't my fault," he growled. "Bos'n said ta put on de brakes, didn't 'e?"

He thrust forward his chin pugnaciously.

"Ya tank Ai mean put 'em on while she ban goin'?" queried the boatswain angrily from across the hatch, and he shook his head in wonder at the winchman's stupidity.

Captain McGuire's lips twitched faintly in a one-sided smile, and when he spoke his voice was low.

"You know as little about seamanship as

you ever did, Malley," he remarked casually, and then, as if stating a simple fact, "You need teaching."

His foot swung quickly in a short arch and landed smartly on the big man's shin.

Malley, surprized by the suddenness of the kick, and thrown partly off his balance, lurched forward and with one groping arm grasped the captain about the shoulders. To the sailors on the other side of the deck, who had not seen the kick below the combing of the hatch, it looked as if Malley had lunged forward with the intention of grappling with the captain. Mr. Tenny, from his vantage point forward on the forecastle-head, was the only one who saw the swiftly delivered kick, and he leaned over the rail with his faded, blue eyes full of delighted interest.

The captain, fully forty pounds lighter than the seaman, and so trimly built that the difference between them looked even greater, stepped backward as if in defense, but his right hand was about the forearm of the big sailor, and while seemingly trying to disengage himself he was in reality pulling the other with him. Malley, thrown still further off his balance, stumbled and fell heavily against the captain.

Captain McGuire stepped swiftly to the right, and his left fist flashed up and opened an inch long cut above the winchman's one good eye-brow, then the same hand curling downward, thudded into Malley's stomach with a force that left him gasping and wobbly. He dropped his hands and teetered helplessly until the captain's right, snapping upward straight and true to the mark, crashed against his chin, then his knees sagged and he slumped to the deck at the small man's feet.

The mate forward, a small, wispy man well past middle age and with skin baked and washed by sun and weather, rubbed his palms briskly and grinned.

"Slick, slick," he murmured approvingly. "Thet's 'One-Two Mac' fer ye. Nobuddy saw th' kick—self-defense—plenty of witnesses—bing, bang, biff! Fight's over—no need to be afeered of th' custom house. Sufferin' mackerel, but 'e's slick!"

He wagged his head in enjoyment.

The captain had turned away and was strolling toward the bridge-ladder, calmly rolling another cigaret as he went. His dark eyes were meditative and he seemed to have entirely forgotten the man who still lay gasping on the deck. At the foot of the ladder he stopped, lighted his cigaret, and with his hands held out palms downward before him, gazed intently at them.

They were peculiar hands; long, lean and large knuckled, and covered with shagreen-like skin. The knuckles were criss-crossed by many small scars. Captain McGuire flexed them several times experimentally, gave a satisfied nod, and slowly climbing the ladder, passed from view.

NEXT morning, during a fine, drizzling rain that chilled to the bone, the *Hawk* slid slowly into her West Street slip. A heaving line snaked out from forward, another from aft, the dock lines were sent ashore and the obsolescent little vessel was warped against the dock with the capstans, assisted by a diminutive tug that fussed and fumed beneath the bow.

The ship was made fast, the booms trained over the inboard side and soon the *Hawk's* miscellaneous cargo of hides, sugar, dye-wood, coffee and general merchandise was being hoisted to the deck and swung to the dock in a steady stream. Canvas rain-sheds were rigged to keep the cargo dry, and the decks, usually so neat and orderly, became cluttered with rigging and dirtied by the trampings of the swarming stevedores. Mr. Tenny groaned, gnashed his teeth and rained curses upon longshoremen in general, but the men only grinned, brought more tackle and dragged more West Street mud across the once spotless decks. They were accustomed to the frettings of irate mates.

The captain went ashore and early in the afternoon returned accompanied by the shipping commissioner, and the crew, mate's, engineer's and steward's departments, gathered outside of one of the mess-rooms to be paid off. They were called one by one, entered, received their money and signed clear, and those that were leaving went below to pack their dunnage.

Mr. Tenny gathered his little flock of ten men, including the boatswain and carpenter, about him and looked them over speculatively. His washed-out eyes were gloomy and when he spoke there was a coaxing whine to his voice and a forced friendliness in his manner that deceived no one.

"I s'pose you b'ys air all goin' to ship over," he remarked to them in a conversational way, and as if he had not the slightest doubt that his supposition was correct.

The group smiled derisively and some, particularly a big, red-faced man who lounged against the rail, laughed outright. Only the boatswain, and Malley, the rough, sandy-bearded man with the scarred countenance, both of whom stood apart from the others, seemed to be in agreement with the mate. The former, his round, moonface blank and apathetic, mumbled an indifferent, "Ai tank so," but Malley merely compressed his lips and nodded.

The red-faced man left the rail, and swaggering to the front grinned arrogantly down at the little mate.

"Chop it, mite," he said in the vernacular of the Liverpool docks. "Chop it. Not on dis wagon. Dis his a —— hold —— ship, I'll say."

He turned his back on Mr. Tenny and faced the men.

"Hi s'pose you b'ys'll all ship over," he said in imitation of the now wrathful mate. "Haw, haw!"

He guffawed loudly and slapped his knee in appreciation of his comedy.

"Don't mean you," growled Mr. Tenny. "Don't want ye anyway. Bose's going to sign on, so's Malley—ain't ye, Malley?"

All eyes were directed at Malley who nodded again, doggedly.

"Yes," he answered sullenly, and he stared unseeingly before him.

"Well, strike me pink!" exclaimed the red-faced comedian. "You ruddy fool! Hof all the — the ——"

He found himself at a loss for words to express his amazement and stared dumbly at Malley.

"What's it to you, Higgins?" Malley advanced threateningly toward the other, who shrank back. "What's it to you? Mind yer own —— business er I'll spoil yer map, ya lime-juice swab. If I wanta sign on agen I will, see? An' I'll let no bucko—One-Two Mac or the —— scare me off a ship. Gwan, beat it, ya red-faced mutt, before I slam ya."

He advanced again and Higgins, his face a picture of stupid amazement, retreated in haste.

Of all the deck force Malley and the boatswain were the only ones who did not leave the *Hawk*, the others packed their bags and tramped down the gangway, only grinning at the curses Mr. Tenny hurled after them. They were too glad to be quit of One-Two Mac, the little ship-master who for two months had made life well nigh unbearable for them, to mind the angry scorn of the mate.

It took two days to discharge the *Hawk's* cargo, and three days more to load her for the next voyage, and it took Mr. Tenny the entire five days to find a crew. He was up and down West Street; literally haunting the union halls, boarding houses and missions, and all other places where seamen were likely to be found, but the word had gone out that he was an emissary for One-Two Mac and the well informed sailors of the water-front avoided him as if he had been a bearer of the plague.

He finally succeeded, but it took a great deal of patience and all of his coaxing, wheedling ways, coupled with his habitual pretense of paternal good nature, to lure them, at the rate of one or two a day, aboard the little freighter.

They were the riff-raff and scrapings of the water-front—"roustabouts and sea lawyers," Mr. Tenny called them—bleary-eyed sots and hard-shell forecastle bullies who would not have been allowed to set foot upon a vessel less ill-reputed than the *Hawk*. Half were drunk and all were filthy and unkempt, and they went about their tasks with a sullen obedience that boded ill for the future well-being of the boatswain.

A more timorous master, or one more peace-loving than Captain Mac, would have let his vessel lie at the dock indefinitely rather than sail with such a motley collection, but the little captain only nodded understandingly, smiled his somber, twisted smile and puffed away indifferently at his interminable brown cigaret. It was nothing new and he was used to having crews composed of the cast-offs of better founded ships and of other, more kindly shipmasters.

Malley stayed throughout the port stay and did his work with a quiet obedience that even old Tenny could not fail to remark. He was unobtrusive and minded his own business with a persistence that as much as said, "And you do the same." He was silent, morose, and he avoided the newcomers as much as was possible in such confined quarters; not from fear, however. He was well able to take care of himself in any forecastle, but seemed merely to desire to create in their minds the understanding that he was *with* but not one *of* them.

He wanted to be let alone and was evidently determined that he would be, for when one big bucko A. B., merely as an experiment, attempted to steal his blanket, Malley swung a murderous right fist that sent the A. B. into a sleep that needed no blankets. Usually a heavy drinker, he did not once leave the ship to indulge in the delights of West Street hooch, and he grimly refused all proffers of mysterious black bottles that the men brought from ashore. It was not until the morning of sailing day that he asked to go ashore, and he came aboard again at noon with a square-wrapped parcel of which he offered no explanation; merely placed it in his locker and warned the observers "hands off" with his eyes.

That afternoon the *Hawk* let go the dock and was yanked out of the slip by the fussy little tug, and after belching an insulting cloud of cinders at the wrathful tug-master, who cursed fervently at her crankiness, steamed down the river on the ebb tide. The voyage, as laid out by the owners—one of whom was Captain McGuire himself—was to include Havana, Cristobal, Porto Colombia, Cartagena and a return by way of Port au Prince and the Windward Passage.

THE day was a cold, sunless one in the late Fall, and at five o'clock, as the rusty-sided little ship rounded Scotland light-ship and churned her way into the bleak, slate-colored swells of the North Atlantic, it was a disgruntled, gloomy-visaged deck force that filed from the mess-room after a meal of cracker hash and hastily boiled potatoes. Captain Mac leaned carelessly over the bridge-rail and watched them as they slouched forward toward the little forecastle, then shifted his gaze to Mr. Tenny, sulking in the corner of the bridge, and his eyes were laughing. Malley, his head up and his chest out, and with his bearing in striking contrast to the rest of the deck force, came from the mess-room and strode forward. Captain McGuire appeared to be surprized and turned to the chief officer.

"Is that Malley?" he asked, pointing below to where the big seaman was elbowing his way through the group that lounged about the forecastle door.

Mr. Tenny glanced down and nodded.

"Thet's him," he answered shortly, then the trouble-making light came into his eyes and he came closer to the captain. "Said 'e wouldn't let you er th' —— run 'im off th' ship."

He put his head on one side and watched the captain's face to get the effect of his words.

"Hmm." He leaned over and made a clucking sound with his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "He is persistent, isn't he?"

Mr. Tenny was not satisfied with the result of his thrust and decided to try again.

"He used to be a prize-fighter ye know—in Chicago—an' I guess 'e still thinks 'e kin lick ye."

"He is a good man," said Captain Mac slowly, throwing cold water on the mate's hopes of brewing trouble. "I like his determination."

Mr. Tenny, disappointed, snatched up the binoculars and stamped angrily back to his corner; the captain smiled and resumed his leaning attitude against the rail.

Malley, hatless and wearing a heavy sweater and a pair of soft gymnasium shoes, came from the forecastle and walked aft as far as number two hatch, directly forward of the bridge. In one hand he held a short length of log line, and in the other he had the paper-wrapped parcel which he had brought from ashore. The latter he deposited on the hatch, then stepping out to the center of the clear space between the hatch and the rail he took an end of the cotton line in each hand and began to skip rapidly in the manner of the experienced pugilist in training.

Captain McGuire straightened and stared, and then, with a strange light in his eyes, turned and went down the ladder. When he came out into the well-deck the big man was still skipping, and the master walked close to him, circled him, and then moved off as if to get a better angle, all the while regarding the seaman with the eyes of a horse-dealer who is inspecting an intended purchase.

The ex-prize-fighter paid him not the slightest attention, but with his eyes glued upon the bridge-railing, where Mr. Tenny leaned over in anticipation, continued seriously with his work. The captain walked over to the hatch and blasted the mate's hopes by sitting down and quietly rolling a cigaret.

Malley finished his rope-skipping, and throwing aside his piece of line, began shadow-boxing, still disregarding the little man who sat calmly watching him from the hatch.

A group of fifteen or twenty of the crew had gathered and were watching curiously, but Malley acted as if they did not exist. He jabbed, crossed, and swung short, crushing blows at his imaginary opponent, all the while sliding in and out and to one side with a graceful ease that was clearly the result of years of practise.

After some minutes of shadow-boxing he stopped, and taking the square package from the hatch, opened it and took from within a set of new boxing-gloves, but with a glance at the sky, which was already beginning to darken with the coming night, he evidently decided that it was too late to continue his training and replaced them, put the box under his arm, and picking up his rope, marched back into the forecastle. Captain McGuire arose and strolled thoughtfully back to the bridge.

"Mr. Tenny," said the captain when he stood upon the bridge beside the vexed chief officer, "tomorrow allow Malley to take two hours off in the afternoon—or better still, let him knock off at three o'clock."

"Two hours off?" exclaimed the mate. "What fer?"

"What for?" Captain McGuire turned as if surprized, but his eyes were laughing. "Don't you see that he hasn't time to do his training after five o'clock? Besides it isn't good to exercise directly after a meal."

"But don't ye know what he's trainin' fer?"

"Perhaps. What does it matter? The fact remains that he hasn't the time to train properly."

Mr. Tenny gave up trying to understand and wagged his head gloomily.

"There's goin' to be —— to pay soon," he remarked. "A prize-fighter training to lick th' cap'n, a gang of drunken, thievin' dock rats in th' fo'c'sle, a bunch of cutthroats in the fire-room—bum quarters—rotten chow—there'll be ——!"

He shook his head and jammed his hands hard down in the pockets of his short, greasy pea-jacket.

"An' a master crazy ez a loon," he muttered to himself.

Captain McGuire, his cigaret glowing brightly in the dusk, was paying scant attention to the grumbling of the mate, but with thoughtful eyes was gazing off toward the fast receding Jersey shore. When he spoke his voice was so low that Mr. Tenny was compelled to lean close to hear.

"Somewhere in that big carcass," he murmured, "is the heart of a man."

"Heh? What was thet?" The mate's mouth hung open and his face was blank.

Without answering the captain turned and went swiftly down the ladder toward his room.

THAT evening at eight o'clock, just as the third mate was relieving Mr. Tenny upon the bridge, a delegation of sailors and firemen came to Captain McGuire's room, and the spokesman, a short, powerfully built A. B. with a crooked nose, knocked at the door. There was a low, "Come in" from within and the knocker threw open the door and stepped across the threshold. His followers, all flushed and angry-eyed, and redolent with cheap water-front whisky, blocked the doorway and listened. The room, lighted only by a single, well-shaded electric lamp, was dim, and the spokesman could not at first discern the small figure seated in the chair before the desk.

"Take off your hat!" snapped a voice from the gloom, and the man's hand involuntarily went to his head and removed his shapeless, slouch hat.

Disconcerted and nettled by the tart reception, the crooked nosed one hesitated, then broke forth angrily—

"Look here, Cap'n Mac——"

"Captain McGuire!" corrected the master sharply.

"McGuire, then, ——! It's——"

"Captain McGuire!" The voice was as cold as the Polar wind.

The man was frantic with passion but he controlled himself, and when he spoke his voice was clear.

"Captain McGuire!!" he said, speaking slowly and distinctly. "It's about de grub. It's not fit fer a dog."

"Well?"

"Well, ——! What're ya gonna do about it?"

"Nothing." The answer was calm and low, almost disinterested.

"Nothin'! ——, d'ya hear that?"

He turned, and with his hands spread in angry helplessness, appealed to his followers crowding the doorway.

"D'ya hear that, mates? He's gonna do

nothin' about it." He turned back and faced the little captain with a glare of anger. "Look here, Captain One-Two Mac," he blurted, and he leveled a thick fore-finger at the indistinct form in the chair, "we're gonna have a understandin' right here and now, see. We knew what to expect when we came aboard yer —— ballyhoo, and yer bucko ways won't go wit us. We want eats, and we want good eats—and plenty of 'em. D'ya hear?"

Captain McGuire arose and, advancing out of the gloom, leaned back against the chart board beside the door.

"A working man should have good food," he said in his quiet manner. "And plenty of it. I agree with you, but I can only give you what the operators put aboard. I am not the sole owner of the *Hawk*, you know. I don't have to tell you all this, but I want to be square and save you from running into trouble." He left the chart board and came closer. "Now, get out of this room!"

"Like —— I will! We want eats, —— yer——"

Afterward, "Crooked Nose" could never explain clearly what had happened. Something came from nowhere and hit him above the eye, something else mashed his lips between his teeth and loosened several teeth, his nose was knocked further askew and a crashing blow to the jaw sent him through the open doorway and into the arms of his surprized shipmates. The door slammed and left them staring stupidly at one another.

The next day Malley began his training at three o'clock and Captain McGuire again sat on the hatch and watched him. When he finished rope-skipping and shadow-boxing Malley induced a huge water-tender to put on the gloves, and they boxed three rounds, at the end of which the water-tender became tired and stopped. The fighter handled his opponent with ease, but it was noticed that he did not try to knock him out.

There was no one else who was willing to box and Malley tied the laces of his gloves together and started for the forecastle, then turned and came back to where the captain still sat on the hatch. He wanted to speak, but hesitated until Captain Mac nodded and smiled in what might almost be called a friendly manner.

"It was you dat said I could have de time off wasn't it, Cap'n?" he asked. "Bose said it was."

"Yes," the captain answered simply.

"Tanks," said Malley.

His expression was puzzled and he searched the captain's face questioningly.

"Glad to help you," said Captain Mac, and again he nodded and gave the smile that was almost friendly.

Malley turned away, hesitated as if he wanted to say something else, and then shook his head and walked swiftly forward. The captain returned to the bridge.

That evening, just after the men had gone to their five o'clock meal, the sailors' mess-boy came running to the bridge with a complaint. He was a thin, pale-faced lad, ill-nourished and with the taint of New York's slums still upon him. His left cheek was bruised and there was a trickle of blood from his nostrils.

"Medders did it, Cap'n," he panted, pointing to his injured face. "Bill Medders. He didn't like de chow, and he hit me wit a plate and punched me in the nose. I can't help it if de food is punk. I ain't de cook."

"Who is Medders," asked the captain.

"He's de big skinny guy wit red hair. An awful rummy, he is. Him and Crooked Nose Dugan are always after me."

"Does Malley bother you?" The captain's voice was casual but his cigaret end was glowly redly.

"Naw—no, sir, I mean. Malley don't bother nobody. And dey don't bother him, either. He knocked Medders coo-coo in Noo Yawk fer stealin' his blanket. Naw—Malley's a regular guy, even if he is a pug. He was in de wash-room takin' a bath when Medders hit me, er I bet he wouldn't a let 'im."

Captain Mac nodded and touched the boy on the shoulder.

"All right, son," he said, "go below. I'll see that they don't bother you tomorrow."

THE next morning while breakfast was in progress the captain went below, looked in upon the sailors in their mess-room, then strolled up and down before the door. His presence was noted, and although there was a bit of low-voiced grumbling, and a number of covert threats for the ears of the mess-boy, there was no open breach of the peace. At noon Captain Mac was again at his post before the mess-room door. There were more muttered threats, more dark looks, but still no open rupture.

Malley, silent and morose as ever, was present at both meals, but he sat sullenly at his end of the table and obstinately refused to notice anything but the plate of food before him. At the evening meal, while Captain McGuire was at one end of his stroll before the door, a boiled potato whizzed by the mess-boy's head and mashed against the side of the room. The mess-boy did not see who threw it and the others would not tell. Malley had not yet finished his shower.

The captain took no action except to order that no potatoes, boiled or otherwise, be served to the sailors' mess in the future.

"Now throw some hash," he remarked to them, but the sailors, not caring to have their scanty bill of fare cut still further, wisely refrained.

The third mate picked up Watling Island light a little after nine o'clock that night and called the captain. The weather was clear and mild, and there was a huge, yellow disk of moon overhead that lighted the decks of the little vessel churning her way on into the tropics. There was a short, choppy sea, brought into being by the mild breeze that came out of the east. Fleecy white clouds rolled over the eastern sea rim and, in the grip of the strong winds that prevailed in the higher altitudes, scurried across the star-lit sky.

Captain McGuire on the bridge, his arms akimbo on the upper edge of the weather-cloth, stared over the bow at Watling light. Malley, at the break of the forecastle, leaned over the rail and gazed off toward the distant horizon. On the tarpaulin covered top of number one hatch the mess-boy lay on his back, staring into the sky and dreaming the dreams of boyhood.

A number of sailors, among them Dugan, passed along the well-deck and after glancing up at the bridge, went into the forecastle. Another smaller group stopped beneath the bridge and conversed in low tones. There was a mumble of wrangling voices just abaft the break of the forecastle, and Malley, surfeited with the continual dissension of the crew, left the rail, and going forward between the eyes sat down on the anchor-chain.

The quarreling voices rose higher and carried even to Malley's remote position in the bow. He heard a curse and the thud of a blow, then there was an agonized scream in the voice of the mess-boy. The fighter arose quickly and hurried aft, and as he went a voice, so scathing, so sharp and vitriol-like, and so coldly menacing that it could belong to no one but One-Two Mac, came to his ears.

"You scum!" said the voice. "You cowardly whelp of Satan! I'll mark you for life for that."

Malley reached the rail at the break and looked over. Captain Mac, his black eyes flaming with a fire such as Malley had never seen in the little shipmaster's eyes before, was facing the tall, red-haired Medders, who, evidently afraid, was backing slowly toward the open forecastle door. The mess-boy, his face writhing in pain and one arm twisted awkwardly beneath his body, lay on the deck beside the hatch.

Medders backed until his heels came in contact with the threshold of the doorway, and while he was in the act of stepping backward into the dark forecastle the captain sprang, lashing out with one long arm as he left the deck. The blow caught Medders upon the lips and the blood spurted, another ripped open his cheek and a third thudded into his belt-line, then the two men were obscured from view by the black mass of struggling men that poured from the forecastle door. The men who had been conversing so quietly beneath the bridge ran forward in a body. Malley, unable to understand the turn events had taken, leaned over the rail and stared down, puzzled, until Medders' voice came from the midst of them.

" 'Bout time, ya tramps! —— near knocked th' face off me while yous wus tinkin' it over."

Malley understood. It was a trap. Madders had drawn Captain Mac from the bridge by torturing the mess-boy, while the others had lain in wait inside the forecastle and beneath the bridge. A neatly planned trap, and the captain had walked directly into it.

Malley was in a quandary. There were within him two forces battling for supremacy; one a desire to help a lone man attacked by half a score, the other a desire to see the man who had punished him so cruelly on the previous voyage, himself punished in turn. He remembered the time Captain Mac had saved him from the voracious jaws of a man-eating shark, but overshadowing that incident were the more recent beatings which the little shipmaster had given him with his terrible hands. He went down the ladder slowly, step by step, one moment deciding to pitch in and help the captain and the next deciding to keep his distance and remain an impartial spectator. He was not quite sure whether Captain Mac was a friend or an enemy.

One-Two Mac, his arms pumping like the piston-rods of an engine, and his tough skinned, dull-knife knuckles leaving a gasping, blood-marked sailor whenever they landed—which was nearly always—fought himself clear of the mass and broke for the bridge, but was tripped up, went down, bounded to his feet, sent a fireman to the deck with a broken jaw, and backed slowly toward the break of the forecastle beneath Malley, who stood part way down the ladder.

Again the captain went down, this time from a heavy swing that caught him behind the ear, and a half-dozen brogues were raised to stamp upon his face, but they blocked themselves by their very numbers and the captain wriggled clear and gained his feet. He backed to the break, and with his shoulders against the cold, iron plates, defied them, and held them temporarily in check, with his flaming eyes. Only for a moment, then they rushed in a body. There was the *smack smack, smack smack, smack smack* that had gained One-Two Mac his name, then he went down beneath half a ton of hitting, kicking, and gouging men.

Malley went farther down the ladder, and when almost at the bottom, again hesitated. His mind a whirlpool of indecision, he stood on the ladder and watched breathlessly. There was a convulsive movement near the bottom of the pile; an arm came forth, a shoulder, then the straining, distorted features of the little shipmaster. He squirmed, twisted half on his side, and still the indomitable fighting man who did not know how to quit, he looked squarely up into the face of the big ex-pugilist and smiled. An anguished, pain-wracked smile, to be sure—but still, a smile. A heavy seaboot crashed downward and Captain Mac's face became a smear of blood.

It was the smile that decided Malley—that and the iron courage of the man who would not quit. It did not ask for help, but it said as plain as words:

"What do you think of this, old man? Ten to one! You and I don't fight like that. Man to man, face to face, blow for blow, that's our style."

Mad with a sudden, uncontrollable rage, the fighter plunged into the fray. With his powerful arms and knees going like triphammers, he fought his way toward the center of the mass, and the mutineers, startled and dismayed by the fury of the unexpected onslaught, opened and let him through. Crooked Nose, a rib broken and driven inward by one of the plunging knees, reeled clear and fell groaning in the waterway, another man, blinded by a terrific blow between the eyes, staggered drunkenly down the deck, crashed against the mainmast and collapsed.

A knife ripped a two-inch gash in Malley's cheek, but he sent the wielder floundering to the deck with a kick to the stomach. At last he stood above the form of the little shipmaster, who was still struggling and trying vainly to force his exhausted limbs to obey his untiring will.

Malley caught Captain Mac by the collar of his uniform coat and dragged him back into the corner formed by the break of the forecastle and the rail, and stepping before him, turned to face the infuriated men, who, urged on by Medders, and insane with the lust to trample and maim, were preparing to charge again.

They rushed and Malley struck indiscriminately at the snarling faces before him. Each blow told, and he swung and swung until his arms became like lead and his rebellious body almost refused to continue, then they halted and fell back.

"Low! Low! Keep low an' dive at 'is feet!" Medders was shouting to them. "Boot th' —— when he goes down!"

There was a slight movement from behind Malley and a tired voice spoke from the corner.

"Stand away, lad," it said, "I'm coming up." A moment later he felt Captain Mac's breath upon his neck. "I didn't train, like you," said the voice again, and without turning Malley knew that the eyes were smiling.

With heads down, and cursing foully, they again came on, and Malley, this time with Captain Mac doing his feeble best at his side, went again into action. Over their heads as they charged he saw Carlsen, armed with a two-foot, rubber hose-nozzle, coming on the run, and farther aft the second and third mates and two engineers were stumbling over one another in their haste to get through the narrow passageway beneath the bridge.

Cheered and heartened by the coming assistance, Malley lurched forward to meet the onrushing sailors, struck and kicked and had almost halted them when a pair of wiry arms wrapped around his legs and threw him prone. He saw a boot coming his way and heard the smack of a fist landing on flesh. The foot sailed harmlessly into the air and there was the thud of a falling body.

"Gave him all I had left," gasped a voice, and Captain Mac slumped to the deck beside him.

The officers, hurriedly called from their sleep by the third mate, who had been relieved on the bridge by Mr. Tenny, arrived in a body.

It was the boatswain, his round face as undisturbed as ever, who settled the matter. He swung his rubber nozzle across the head of Medders, and the end, weighted with a heavy brass coupling, bent downward and struck the red-haired one between the eyes. Another swing laid low a coal-passer, and the four officers drove the remainder into the forecastle and soon had them in irons.

They picked Captain Mac up, and with Malley stumbling weakly in the rear, carried him to the foot of the bridge-ladder. They were about to begin the ascent when the little man came to, shook them off and sat painfully down upon the bottom tread. They stood silently, wondering, while he sat with his face in his hands. Blood trickled from between his fingers and splashed upon the teak-wood deck.

Mr. Tenny came to the top of the ladder.

"All right, Cap'n?" he called. "Was comin' down to help ye, but didn't think ye'd need me. Ye see——"

"Go to ——!" answered the captain thickly.

He groped for the hand-rail and pulled himself slowly erect.

"Where's—where's——"

He saved his breath and looked about at the surrounding faces.

"Malley," he said simply, and held out his hand.

"Cap'n Mac."

The big seaman came forward and his eyes were proud.

They gripped and smiled. Anguished, pain-wracked smiles, to be sure—but still, smiles.

PIDGIN-ENGLISH ON THE NIGER

by Thomas Samson Miller

HOWEVER "Ma" came to be West African for a white woman is one of those unexplainable mysteries of the pidgin-English of the Niger. Probably some joker started it. All the same, when you hear a six-foot-giant in a G string calling a dumpy little missionary from Kansas—they all seem to come from Kansas—when you hear the black calling the little woman "Ma" it is not merely ludicrous but astounding.

On the other hand it is easy enough to understand why a gasoline launch is a "puck pucka," a train is a "land canoe," an ocean steamer an "Oo-oo-oo," which is an imitation of the ship's siren. Whilst "chop" for food, and "savvy" for understand are common the world over. But how did "at once" come to be expressed as "one time"? You say, "do it one-time," and if the black is unable to carry out your order immediately he will say he is "no fit to do it one-time, but fit to do it two-time," which being interpreted means he is unable (no fit) to do it at once, but will do it presently.

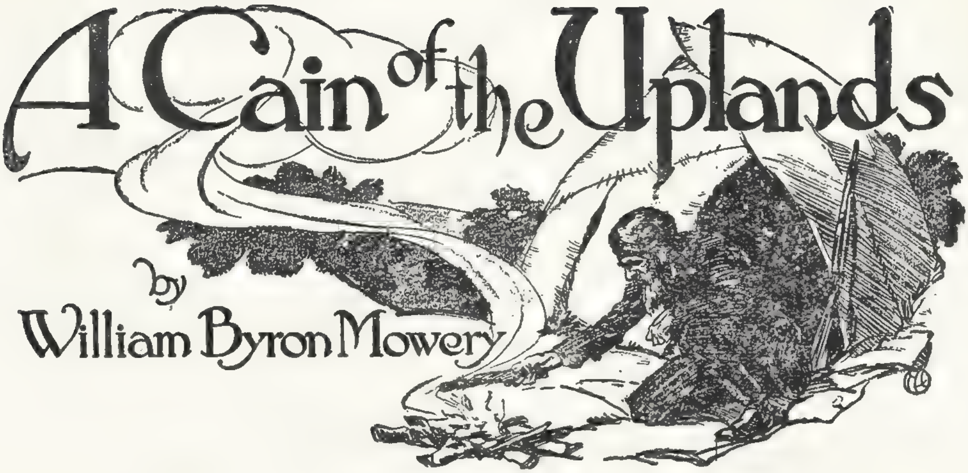
A "bwoy" is a "massa's" personal servant, whilst a "book" is a letter or written message. When returning home you part from your faithful black at port he will beg for "good-bwoy book; what say; I no lie; I no tief; I be clean."

A mountain is "land dat lib for sky;" "lib for" means lives—exists. You send your boy with a message and he finds the white man away he reports, "de massa no lib"—was not there. How came a gift or present to be called a "dash"? "Open palms" for friendliness and "closed fists" for enmity explain themselves, but—well, one might write a book about the peculiarities of the pidgin-English of the Niger.

A Cain of the Uplands

by

William Byron Mowery



Author of "Matched Silvers"

THERE was not one person in the crude court room at Nigishun who did not know the verdict would be *guilty*. There was not one person who sympathized with Harvey Duss, as he sat with bowed head, not daring to look into the eyes of the Labrador "liveyeres" on the benches of the court room.

"To be hanged by the neck until dead, and may God have mercy upon your soul," were the measured words of Judge Pyre, up from Rigolette for the trial.

There was no out-cry in the room; only a low murmur of satisfaction with the just finding of the Law. Cunliffe Lovett, brother and only relative of the murdered man, rose up and thanked the Judge and the jury; and quietly left the court room. Deputy Tas French and a volunteer led the shackled prisoner out of the box. The anxious faces of the Judge, the sheriff, and the jury foreman cleared up as the rough audience peacefully dissolved into groups of two and three.

The murder of Donald Lovett had been brutal and without shadow of justification. It had come out of the rivalry of the Duss trading-post and the cooperative store sponsored and managed by the Lovett brothers. For fifteen years Harvey Duss had run his independent post at Nigishun. The only trader within seventy-five miles, he had got a strangle-hold on the fishers and trappers, the liveyeres* of the near coast and the Nigishun River valley.

The evil credit system showed itself in its worst light under Duss. He had enslaved the people that were forced to trade with him at the post. The Crees, Micmacs, and Nascaupees, who borrowed their Winters' supplies, were forced to sell their Spring furs to Duss at the trader's own prices. They were always in his debt, sinking deeper and deeper each year. When they tried to sell their furs elsewhere and pay him cash, he cut off their supplies and starved them. The untaught liveyeres, always living from hand to mouth along this "Starvation Coast," fared no better than the Indians. Many a trapper at the end of ten Winters' hard work asked for a settlement, and found himself three or four thousand dollars in debt to the trader.

A handful of young unmarried trappers and fishermen had led the revolt. The Lovett brothers, who had got a slight educaion at the St. John's Mission Orphantage, and who had caught the idea of the cooperative post from a highly successful one three hundred miles down the coast, had set the store on its feet by careful management and by fearlessly bucking the established system. Without them, particularly without Donald Lovett, the store would have gone under in its first days.

Harvey Duss was a fighter. He had an overwhelming ambition to lead men, to use them to his own advantage. He reveled in lashing the whip over the men in his power. The lonely life of the bush-trapper would have been a daily death to him. He was a city product, a man who lived on the labor of other men, and found fraternity with other men sweet—and profitable.

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*Liveyeres those who "live here" the year around. The Newfoundland fishermen stay on the Labrador coast only through the cod season.

When he realized the Lovett store was rescuing the liveyeres from his clutches and that Donald Lovett was his match in shrewdness, his plans turned to murder. Not by his own hand; he had a streak of physical cowardice which kept him from meeting the elder Lovett face to face and killing him. He planned another scheme—one that he thought would cover up his tracks.

Along with his other lines, he traded in huskies. Always there was a gang of ten to twelve half-starved dogs around the post house at the foot of the sheltering cliff. That October day of the murder, when the offals around the fish stages had played out and before he had put the huskies on their Winter rations, they were vicious, surly, and dangerous.

Walking alone down the shore of the Tickle, Donald Lovett was caught defenceless and torn to pieces by the Duss pack, scarcely a quarter of a mile from the cabin of Rene Radin, where he had been headed. Radin had seen Duss take the pack into a larch thicket overlooking the Tickle path and had seen him hurry away from the spot after Donald Lovett had gone down beneath the dozen slashing, bloodthirsty huskies.

Lovett had a reason for going to Rene Radin's cabin; and that reason was Marie Radin. They were to have been married Thanksgiving Day. Rene Radin knew better than to let his daughter see the mangled figure after he had shot and clubbed the huskies away from it. He was a shrewd old man—Rene Radin. He loved both the Lovett brothers as if they had been his own sons; and after the death of Donald, he asked Cunliffe to visit him often evenings, and help him keep Marie from grieving.

The evening after the trial and verdict, Deputy French and his volunteer aid started to take the condemned man down the coast to Rigolette for safe keeping. The trio started in a fishing boat, expecting to make the trip down by noon the next day.

But the next afternoon the little fishing boat was back in Nigishun Tickle with the news that the prisoner had escaped during the night—had slipped overboard without a ripple or a splash and swum ashore.

There was a stormy meeting that night in the Lovett store. The men had let the Law have the murderer, and the Law had let him escape. Deputy French and his aid were threatened.

Rene Radin rose and spoke to the point. Harvey Duss was to be shot on sight, if and when he showed up at any trapper's shack or fisherman's cabin or trading-post. He could not go down the coast and escape without showing himself in that eight hundred mile trip. Word would be sent north to Chidley and all down the east bay coast by the late Fall steamer. The man would be trapped; would be penned up in the wilderness. The posts were few and scattered. Duss was known at every one of them. He could not escape. He would know better than to try—till starvation and Winter brought him in.

The spot where he had gone ashore was just off the mouth of a small river. It was almost impossible to travel along the rocky coast on foot. Back in the interior in the deer bush and boulder swells, it would be possible for a man to live a while on the bake-apple berry, the dwarf-cranberry, and the small game he could snare or club.

Two weeks passed without a sign or movement from the missing murderer, and the first deep snow fell. Cunliffe Lovett believed that Harvey Duss was living back in the interior close to Nigishun, and would have to come in shortly. His fierce desire for revenge settled into a steady, grim purpose. Personally he saw that the plan of Rene Radin was carried out. There was not a cabin, shack, or trading-post on the northeast coast or down the east bay coast that had not heard of the escape and was looking for the murderer to show his face. Word of the five hundred dollars reward for Harvey Duss *dead* was bruited up and down the coast; and kept the liveyeres on the alert.

Marie Radin helped him manage the post store, enlarged since there was no competition from Duss. Between them at first there was that community of feeling which comes from a common loss. They were together almost every day of the long Winter. Rene Radin was a shrewd old man, and he liked Cunliffe Lovett almost as much as ever he liked the elder brother. With no whit less loyalty to his dead brother, Cunliffe began to hope that Marie Radin might become Marie Lovett. He knew Donald would have it so. The shrewdness of Radin was in turning Marie's thoughts from the memory of Donald to Cunliffe. When Spring came, there was a substantial rumor afloat that Marie had promised to marry Cunliffe. Not a trapper came into the post with his Winter's catch, but said it was a good thing.

But Marie had not promised Cunliffe definitely. He sensed that she would not marry him till he had found and punished the murderer of his brother. And he found no fault with her stand on the matter.

One day in the late Spring, when the snow had gone, when the "swiling" ships had come up from St. Johns, picked up men and gone "down north" to the fields of sea ice, and the cod and peal were starting to come in, a solitary Cree slipped in to the post with a small catch of fur. Cunliffe wondered why he had brought in his catch so long after the other Crees had come and gone. The grub and articles that the Indian wanted in trade were peculiar; they were things the Crees did not use—a rifle, ammunition, an ax, cooking-utensils and white man's food.

Cunliffe questioned the Cree closely, but found out nothing from his monosyllabic answers. With his suspicions aroused, he gave the Indian a bottle of ninety-proof gin and got him drunk in half an hour. He found out what he wanted to know. With four fingers of the gin in him, the Cree got communicative.

He had been sent in with the fur by a white man living up in the interior almost to the Ungava Height of Land. The white man had cautioned him against telling who had sent him or whom he was getting the supplies for. The Indian's description fitted but one man—Harvey Duss.

All of Cunliffe Lovett's bitter hate of the man flared out when he learned that the murderer had managed to survive in the wilderness through the inexorable Winter and was planning on hiding there permanently, to judge from the supplies and equipment he had sent for through his messenger. He got the approximate location of the shack from the Indian; and let him sleep off his drunk behind the stove while he went down to the beach where Radin was working on a fish-stage.

"It's a long trip to Otelnuk at the Height of Land," Radin told him. "You and I will go, because the matter is one for you and me alone to settle. How the rat-face ever got back up there—ten days' swift travel with the komatik in Winter—is more than I know. He is the first white man to see that lake. Only the Crees and Nascaupees of the Upper Nascaupee can tell you about it."

"But can you stand that long trip?" Cunliffe asked.

Radin laughed.

"When Harvey Duss is at the other end of the trail, I can go as far as you can. Go now and get ready. Give that Cree his supplies and send him back tonight. He will travel quicker than we can. Slip into one of the packages one of the reward signs."

Cunliffe said good-by to Marie that evening.

"Don't take any risks, you and daddy," she told him. "But remember the way Donald died."

"I remember," Cunliffe assured her, "and so does our *pere* Radin. When I come back, we can take that trip to St. Johns and feel that Donald is revenged to the full."

"I wouldn't take it otherwise," she replied, with a passion that revealed to Cunliffe the elemental woman.

* * *

LOVETT and Radin traveled up the shallow Nigishun for seventy-five miles, toting past the heart-breaking portages and dizzy rapids, paddling across deep lakes through which the river ran, and poling through narrow gorges cut out of the solid rock. They were four days covering that stretch. On the fifth day they cached the canoe and struck directly into the deer bush for the Height of Land country where the mighty, unknown Otelnuk lay.

The trip even to them was a nightmare. Mosquitoes from the thousands of hidden lakes buzzed in swarms around them. Their bites were like the touch of red-hot wires. At night they pattered like rain on the small pup tent. There was no keeping them out, no driving them away with smoke. Face, neck, ankles, and hands were covered black with them. Their bites carried no fever in that latitude, but they swelled up and got inflamed. They were a torture at every step. There was nothing to do but endure them.

On the higher terraces and boulder swells where cold eastern winds swept across from the great bay, the mosquitoes could not live; but there the deer flies took their place and were even worse. They bit so deeply that the blood ran. They could bite through the clothing that the men wore. They settled on every exposed surface and stuck with the tenacity of a leech. They could not be scared away; they had to be smashed. They hit the travelers in the face with the inpact of a hornet. In their great numbers and savageness they were more than a nuisance; they were dangerous, because they sucked so much blood. Many days in the infested terraces the men could not have stood.

Food was scarce. The caribou, mysterious Labrador wanderers, had erratically migrated somewhere. During the whole trip Cunliffe and Radin saw not one. The chortle-berry, the bake-apple and the wild huckleberry were small and green. The rabbit and willow grouse had disappeared before the hordes of mice. It was a mouse year in the uplands. There were myriads of the great, gray fellows, big almost as rats, nesting under every stone. They swarmed around the granite boulders and undermined the reindeer-moss with innumerable runways. Literally they ate up the country. There was nothing for the rabbit or ptarmigan to live on. They swam across the streams after night and were dragged down by the fish till the fish were inedible. They tasted mousey. Even the half-pound fontenalis gorged them.

For the foxes, the lynxes, the wolves and the bears it was a great season. Cunliffe shot a black bear, after watching him turn over little flat rocks and smack the scurrying mice with his huge paw. But the bear meat had the musty odor of mice and, though fat and tender, was inedible.

For twelve days Cunliffe and Radin headed west, climbing into the Height of Land country. A great pile of deer bones, crushed to get out the marrow, was the only human sign they saw. The scattered, thin bands of Crees and Nascaupees and the Micmacs themselves rarely wandered that far away from the fringe of civilization along the coast. The deer-bush got scrubbier, the moss played out completely, there was no longer larch or balsam or spruce except in spots—nothing but desolate gray boulder-swells, leaden skies, bare slopes, chilly winds, and torturing insects.

On the morning of the thirteenth day, Cunliffe climbed a high terrace and looked twenty miles to the west upon a great body of water of which he could not see the western shore at all. He called Radin up the slope and they talked it over.

There was no doubt it was the uncharted Otelnuk, Turtle Lake, of the far-roving Micmacs. The "turtle's" head was a broad round estuary running out of sight into a range of hills. On the near side two flappers extended miles back into the hills. In the middle of the lake a row of small granite islands stuck up like spines in the back of an Eocene monster.

"He lives at the head of Otelnuk," Cunliffe said, pointing at the distant water.

"We will hurry up and camp on the lake tonight," Radin replied. "We must turn north to miss the northeast flapper. Tomorrow we will look for the shack and Harvey Duss."

They were appalled when they approached the lake that afternoon. It was damp and chilly for miles around. The great body of water chilled the warm winds from the southeast; in that late season it still had slob ice floating in it. A bank of low clouds hung over the lake, shutting out the sunlight and spitting a slow rain at times. Dwarf balsam stood clumped together here and there; the rest of the ground was bare or covered with a wiry grass that had sharp, cutting leaves. The desolate country was a bleak, cheerless, monotonous expanse of low hills and rocky hollows.

"Not even an Indian within one hundred miles of this God-forsaken lake!" Cunliffe exclaimed. "The rat-face certainly did pick a safe spot, but how under heaven did he get up here?"

"Probably picked up with some Indians that brought him most of the way. He is in mortal terror of getting discovered and hanged or shot, or he wouldn't have chosen such a place as this to live in, or stay so far from the coast. He was a sociable man—in his way."

BY EVENING they had come out upon the wind-swept beach and had traveled well up along the neck of the "turtle." They camped in a little rocky gorge to cut off any view of their fire.

It rained continually all night; and the morning chill pierced to the bone.

Carefully and slowly they edged up around the lake. The Cree had given them only an approximate location of the shack. They kept well back into the deer bush.

At the top of a little boulder-swell that afternoon, Cunliffe stood behind a rock and looked up along the beach slope. He motioned excitedly to Radin, who was climbing up behind him. Radin looked where Cunliffe pointed.

A lop-sided shack was partly hidden in a clump of black balsam, a quarter of a mile ahead of them. A thin wisp of smoke curled up from the clump.

At sight of the figure chopping wood behind the shack, Cunliffe raised his heavy caribou rifle to his shoulder. Radin stopped him.

"Fool, he didn't shoot Donald, did he? Let's get closer and think up something better than *that!*"

They crept up through the balsam till they were scarcely fifty yards away. The shack was a crazy one, mud-plastered, the work of a man without tools or skill. They could not, even at that short distance, recognize the man as Harvey Duss, except by his stature and gait.

He was clothed in a tattered array of cloth and skins. His hair was long and shaggy; his beard concealed his face. He coughed as he chopped.

Cunliffe nudged Radin.

"Lunger. This lake did it."

Radin nodded.

In a few minutes the man quit chopping, went into the cabin, got a new rifle that Cunliffe recognized, and started down along the beach. He disappeared half a mile away.

"Let's have a look around that shack," said Radin. "Be careful and don't leave any tracks."

Some chips and animal bones were scattered about in front of the door, and smelled strongly. The whole shack had a bad odor. They had to stoop to get through the small door. There was no floor or window—nothing but a hole in the roof for the smoke to go out. The fire-place was a few stones in a corner of the hut. There were wide cracks in the walls where the mud had dropped out. A palette of criss-cross limbs was raised a few inches off the ground. Some wolf and caribou skins were tacked together for bed-clothes. The shack had a sickening musty odor that was almost intolerable.

The reward sign was tacked on the inside of the door.

"He keeps it there in front of him as a reminder of what would happen to him if he ever goes in to civilization," said Radin. "Do you see, he's fixing the shack up to stay here?"

"Yes, I noticed that. He'll stay here all right, but he won't have to worry about the shack or anything else."

Rene Radin reflected, staring at the sign.

"Is the worst possible death any too good for the man that put those huskies on Donald Lovett? Don't you think it would be more than foolish to shoot him?"

"Foolish to shoot him?"

"Would *you* rather die quickly by that rifle of yours, or stay here in this hole by this infernal lake, cut off from everybody, with a Cree to go in to the Post for you once a year—to stay here till you died from that cough?"

"He has only a couple years of that torture at the most, though," Cunliffe interrupted.

"But two years—when you're a lunger," Radin pursued.

"Why did we come up here?"

"To revenge Donald and to revenge him to the full. Now we must get out of here before he comes back."

At dusk a chill rain set in. From the dripping thicket they watched Duss come back, empty-handed from his hunt. He squatted over a smoky fire outside and cooked his supper, rather than fill the shack with smoke.

The watchers saw him take a folded scrap of newspaper from his pocket, read it several times by the fire-light, and put it away again. Cunliffe recognized it as a part of the old paper he had used in wrapping the parcel of lassy pork-bun that the Indian had brought back.

The wisdom of Radin's advice dawned gradually upon Cunliffe. To leave him unmolested and go back to the post would be infinitely fuller a revenge than the swift one he had been counting upon taking at the first sight of the murderer. Cut off from white men and even Indians, living on the desolate flat lake, and already a lunger, the man would experience a thousand deaths in his brief time left.

Radin clasped his arm.

"Are you ready to go back?"

Cunliffe fingered his rifle nervously.

"Will you tell Marie that Donald has been revenged to the full?"

"Yes. I promise you for her."

"Then, I will go back and leave him here."

THE two men struck hands. Silently they crept out of the thicket and slipped back into the swells. Half a mile away, on a low hill, they stopped and looked back through the dusk.

A solitary figure, holding his coat over his head to keep off the rain, was squatting over a smoky fire.

BUCKO

by Frederic Campbell

NIGHT. The seas are sweeping the *Susie Mann* with the hammering rush that is the Bay of Biscay's trade-mark; and the hurricane is going through her cordage with the howl only heard on a windjammer which is trying to plumb —— with her bowsprit while she kicks the black sky with her stern. The captain and second mate got caught between the rail and ten tons of sea-water this forenoon; the first mate's getting two hours' rest after a day and a half on his feet. The third officer has the deck—his first trip since he got his ticket—and the big dago that shipped at Limehouse has refused to go aloft.

A glare of lightning illumines the deck. The third sees the rest of the men watching him, wondering what he'll do. He's only eighteen, but—he's an officer. They're trying him out. Something swells to bursting inside his chest, and he jumps for the dago's throat.

That was a knife—just slit his shoulder. His head bumps against the Italian's teeth; he swings his right upward, and feels it jar the bristly chin. The dago has him around the waist, when a great sea picks up both men, carries them twenty feet, and hurls them into the scuppers.

Pitchy dark. Why is the dago so limp? He wouldn't go aloft—must have hit his head on something——

"I'll teach the sons of dogs," says the third mate unprintably; and, with the sagging body of his enemy over his shoulder, staggers, between seas, to the weather shrouds.

In another flare of blue light, the watch sees him carrying the mutineer up the foremast ratlines; in a momentary lull of the gale they hear fragments of a shout "Show you—go—aloft—swine!" The bosun, staring into the impenetrable black, recognizes an old whaling trick, and wonders where the kid learned it. No monkey business with this third. Mast-heading him. . . .

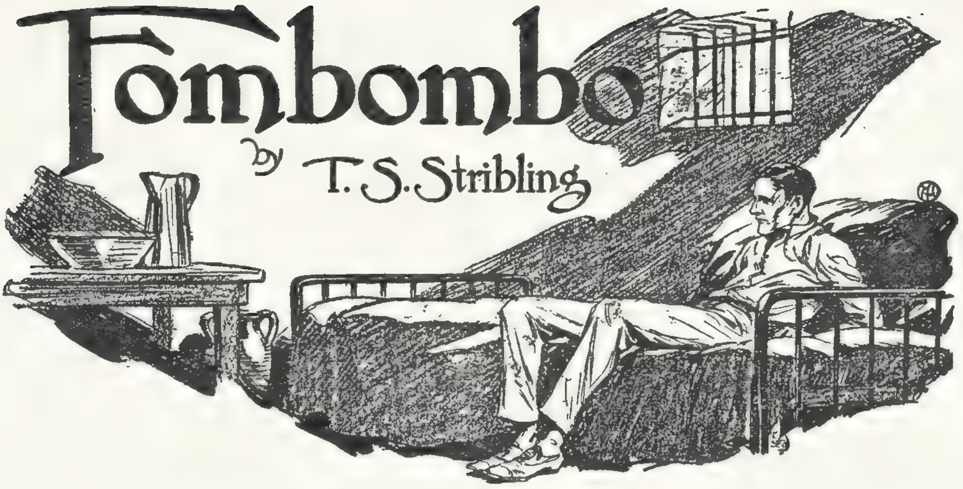
To the streaming foretopmast crosstrees, as the mast-head swings in sickening arcs through the chaos of sleet, the third-mate lashes the dago; and descends to the deck as the first mate comes on watch, shuddering and half-awake. Into his ear the third screams news; then stumbles off to his cabin. He's white-faced with exhaustion, and his soaked bed looks tempting; but he goes into the alleyway, which groans, creaks, heaves, and runs with seeped water, looking for the ship's cat. He finds her, draggled and cold, a stringy black-and-white with pink eyes, outside the door behind which the Old Man groans, and picks her up.

"Poor pussy—come on to bed. Cold ol' night, for a li'l cat. Come on, puss——"

Still in his oilskins, he falls into his bunk; and while, fifty feet up in the icy night, the awakening dago shivers and screams, the third mate goes to sleep; the pink-eyed cat purring and carding as she snuggles her nose into his neck.

Fombombo

by T. S. Stribling



Conclusion

Author of "The Web of the Sun."

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THOMAS STRAWBRIDGE, salesman for an American firearms company, faced the American consul in Caracas, Venezuela, and declared—

"The fellow who pulls slick stuff in a business deal has hit the chutes for the bowwows."

Yet ten minutes later, when Strawbridge had been appraised that the selling of arms and ammunition in Venezuela was illegal, he was on his way to General Adriano Fombombo, President of the revolutionary State of Rio Negro, with an address and a recommendation slipped into his hand by the consul at their farewell handclasp.

Strawbridge realized his inability to find the address—an ancient usage had given the name to the street corners instead of to the streets—and enlisted the services of the diffident young bull-fighter, Felipe, who nonchalantly led the way to a blue-fronted house.

The door was opened by a negro.

For some minutes the negro played the rôle of ignoramus until satisfied that Strawbridge was not an agent of the Government, then introduced himself as Guillermo Gumersindo, editor of *Il Correo del Rio Negro* at Canalejos, the seat of Fombombo's Government, whither he offered to take Strawbridge.

"When do we start?" asked Strawbridge, thinking of a huge order of rifles from the revolutionary general.

"When you feel like it, *señor*. Now if you're ready."

The same afternoon Gumersindo, Strawbridge and Felipe started for the northern province in the editor's automobile.

Once inside the free and independent territory of Rio Negro Strawbridge beheld the fruits of Fombombo's dictatorship in the form of a huge canal to connect with the Orinoco being dug by filthy and ill-nourished prisoners, known as "reds." They crowded about the machine. One of them hung over the side and begged:

"*Señor*, I had a pretty daughter, little Madruja. I meant to give her to Esteban for a wife, but the *jefe civil* broke up my home and sent me here. *Señor*, are you going to Canalejos?"

Felipe put in:

"I will find your Madruja, *señor*, and care for her as if she were my own. Do you give her to me?"

"*Oh, si, si. Un million gracias!*"

Along the entire way to Canalejos Strawbridge expounded the virtues of American democracy, to which Gumersindo replied that they were pleasant enough theories, but that in Venezuela the Government, because of the unreliability of the peons, had to be a dictatorship. The practise was amply illustrated after Strawbridge's meeting with Fombombo at the gate of Canalejos. Waiting to enter behind them was a peon on horseback.

"What are you doing on that horse, Guillermo Fando? Is it yours?" asked Fombombo.

"*Si*, your Excellency," replied the man.

"Take it at once to my cavalry barracks and deliver it to Coronel Saturnino. A donkey will serve your purpose."

The peon obeyed.

As the party neared the Plaza Mayor they saw a crowd gathered about Fombombo's house waiting for the performance of a legal wedding ceremony. Felipe, discovering that the bride was little Madruja and her affianced, Esteban, halted the ceremony in the name of her father. Madruja—a tall panthress of a girl—was sent by Fombombo to his house—where Strawbridge was also to be a guest—to await an investigation.

Evening brought the meeting of Strawbridge with Fombombo's household—his tiny Spanish wife in her Carmelite nun's habit, taken to fulfil a vow for the recovery of her sister, and Coronel Saturnino,

"Fombombo," copyright, 1923, by T. S. Stribling.

who explained the intentions of Fombombo for the expansion of Rio Negro finally to include all Venezuela, the first step to be an attack on San Geronimo, for which campaign Strawbridge enlisted.

Strawbridge, whose enthusiasm had been fired by the vision of a big order for rifles, went to bed with nothing having been agreed upon by Fombombo.

Next morning in the street Felipe, drunk and outraged, poured out to Strawbridge the tale of the abuse he had suffered the night before. He had gone to the general's house to serenade Madruja, whereupon Fombombo opened the window and called:

"Sing to us, Felipe. As to your paternal duties, your ideas went out of date with the Neanderthal man five hundred thousand years ago."

Laughing, Strawbridge excused himself and went on toward the cathedral where he met Gumersindo, but not until he had called upon a hardware store and discovered that because the populace was taxed heavily at any sign of prosperity, their business methods were hopelessly antiquated.

RETURNING Strawbridge passed the dense hedge near the Plaza and heard a woman and a man quarreling. A few minutes later Señora Fombombo left the garden and hurried into the State house. When he investigated Strawbridge could not find the quarreling parties.

Strawbridge found Señora Fombombo in the music room.

"May I ask why you followed me here?" she questioned slowly.

"Sure. I heard a rough-house over in the garden, and I saw you come out of the gate. I knew they had frightened you, and it made me mad. I'll go along with you whenever you go to the cathedral, so none of these toughs can scare you."

"That is very kind, and it's a very unexpected kindness, Señor Strawbridge. I am very grateful——"

While watching the sunset Señora Fombombo and Strawbridge unburdened themselves to each other. Señora Fombombo—Dolores—was struck numb by the recital of her husband's cruelties; Strawbridge left cold by his apparent lack of business foresight. Strawbridge was convinced that he should offer advice to Fombombo and started off to find him.

In the Plaza he was accosted by Felipe and Esteban, who was half-married to Madruja. It was from them he learned that Josefa, the little hardware clerk, had been imprisoned for telling him about the Government tax system; and from him the bull-fighter and his friend learned that Strawbridge had joined the expedition against San Geronimo.

"And," said Esteban, "it makes no difference if *he* is right or wrong. You will help him steal my Madruja, steal Señor Fando's horse, steal Señor Rosario's ranch, put Josefa in irons, do this, that and the other, break our bodies, destroy our souls, cut us down and grind us like corn in his mill!"

The Venezuelans could not understand Strawbridge and his chase after business; he was at a loss to gather the secret of their careful questioning of him. But for a moment he wondered if there was not room in his business philosophy for a little personal consideration.

His next move brought him to the west wing of the *palacio* where he found Fombombo with Madruja. Disgusted, Strawbridge spoke to the general of his relationship to Madruja, and this little matter, as well as that of the imprisonment of Josefa, was waved aside so effectively by Fombombo that Strawbridge had to admit defeat for the first time in his salesmanship life. He could not sell an American moral principle to Fombombo.

As Strawbridge turned to say good-by to Madruja she looked over his shoulder and at the doorway, and mouthed one word——

"Esteban!"

In a moment Strawbridge whirled and flung himself in a tackle at Esteban, from whose hand flew the knife intended for Fombombo's heart.

Esteban, instead of being executed or imprisoned, was ignominiously kicked out of the palace by the guards. Thus Fombombo sought to undermine his morale.

The expedition of San Geronimo took the cavalcade past the hacienda of an English meat-packing company, which was tended by George Tolliver and his wife, Lizzie. From them the army took twenty horses, three cows, fifty chickens and eleven ducks, and Strawbridge took a headful of condemnations of Fombombo.

In the actual attack on the town, when Fombombo's cavalry under Lieutenant Rosales were about to be repulsed, Strawbridge, suddenly seized with the primitive instinct to fight, swung the cavalry charge and won the day, but it cost him a wound in one hand, which was struck by a bullet as he was attempting to get atop a house.

With effort he made his way to the river to get medical aid from a ship. He found his help in Noe Vargas, commander of the *Concepcion Inmaculada*, who in lieu of surgical bandages offered him the use of his one clean shirt. Characteristically Strawbridge began to talk on his favorite topic—business.

STRAWBRIDGE was a hero; he didn't know it, however, until Gumersindo and Saturnino came aboard the *Concepcion Inmaculada* and explained that Rosales, caught up in the excitement of the fight, had attempted an insurrection and had lost. He had been executed into the bargain. But Strawbridge had won the day for them.

Days later, Strawbridge, raving with solar fever and the complications in his wounded hand, reached Canalejos, and with the return of consciousness found that he was in the care of Señora Fombombo. Began for him the long days of convalescence in which the only happiness, so he discovered, was Dolores' presence. One afternoon Stawbridge found the *señora* in the music room, crying, her nun's hood having fallen off. He was astonished at the beauty of her hair. For the first time she explained. The nun's habit had been a ruse of Father Benicio's because she wished to avoid contact with Fombombo, and the priest knew that the habit would prove an effective deterrent.

"So you are not wearing it for your sister after all?" asked Strawbridge.

"I never had a sister," said Dolores.

Within an hour an elopement had been planned. With the capture of San Geronimo, Fombombo had acquired many Federal rifles. Consequently Strawbridge saw no reason why the dictator should order additional arms from him. Moreover, Dolores was married to a beast; Strawbridge loved her; there was nothing for either of them to do but leave the country.

Fifteen minutes later Fombombo and his staff, returned from a *fiesta*, decorated Strawbridge for his bravery. Secretly Strawbridge laughed at the irony of the proceeding.

The elopement was set for the second day, and on the day previous Strawbridge went to the river and bought a boat for their removal to the coast. On his return home he stopped to talk to an old woman who did char work in the cathedral. She was the grandmother of Josefa, and pleaded with Strawbridge for the release of her unfortunate grandson. He explained that he had no means of effecting such a release.

"But," cried the old woman, "when are you going to sack the prison?"

Slowly dawned upon him the full intent of Felipe's remarks to him in the plaza the day previous. Felipe thought and had spread the news around that Strawbridge was to start a revolution and release the people from the tyranny of Fombombo. They were ready for his stroke.

The girl went to Father Benicio for confession, and the next day the priest took Strawbridge and Dolores to the cathedral. After many exhortations he appealed to them so effectively that they saw the folly of the elopement. Their plan could not go through. As one argument in the matter the father handed Strawbridge a properly signed contract for a large order of rifles and ammunition.

"How came you with this, father?"

"I asked for it, my son."

"Then does the general know everything?"

"I suppose so. He has a fairly competent intelligence department, you know."

That day he removed his belongings from the *palacio* to Father Benicio's. He walked slowly after the porters around the gardens to the priest's house. He was a drummer again.

THE priest's house was the largest and finest of that proliferation of buildings which clung about the skirts of the cathedral. It was two stories in height and built of stone. Its flat roof reached to about one-third of the height of the cathedral walls. The *motif* of the green carving over the big double door was a cross.

A horse and cab always stood in the sunshine before the priest's house for the use of his Grace, the bishop, Father Honorius. Almoners and donors came and went all day long to and from the priest's house.

Here the bishopric received fees from the rents of ecclesiastical properties, tithes, the Church taxes, endowments for masses and what not. It was a clearing-house for the ghostly ministrations which the priests performed in the parish; it was the go-between 'twixt the market-place and the millennium.

The look of the priest's house managed to convey an impression of this dual service. Its façade was a flat, dignified stone plastered in yellow and relieved by the single dull-green carving over the door. The windows were small, barred and as unrevealing as the faces of the priests themselves.

The place had somehow a look of wealth and penance. One felt that dignitaries and beggars, pain and pleasure, death and riches were received with an equal hand in this imperturbable house. The most casual glance told that no woman lived within its walls.

STRAWBRIDGE rang the bell, and his porters lined up patiently in the sunshine. An old man with a twist in his neck opened the door, glanced obliquely at the visitors and inquired what was wanted. Strawbridge gave the name of Father Benicio. The wry-necked one nodded and closed the door, and Strawbridge could hear him shuffling down the hall.

The sick man stood silently in the heat outside the enigmatic façade. At a faint clinking he looked around and saw the cab-horse swinging its head for a momentary riddance of flies. The drummer continued gazing vacantly at the swarming pests as they resettled in the corners of the horse's eyes and on the sag of its tremulous lips.

The door opened, and Father Benicio stood to one side to allow the file to enter. The porters got under way patiently. The priest spoke to Strawbridge in the tones one uses to a man who has suffered some great calamity. He told him his room was ready and that he hoped the drummer would feel that the bishopric was his own home.

The priest led the way through a short passage to an interior doorway. This gave on a large, hot room screened off from a patio. Through an open door on the left Strawbridge saw a large, somberly furnished room with an altar occupying one end and old-fashioned paintings of men in ecclesiastical garb on the side walls.

Father Benicio led the way past this door along a very narrow passage flanked on both sides by small monastic cubicles. Into one of these the father ushered the drummer. Its interior was finished in roughly dressed stone covered with plaster. An iron bed, an unpainted table, bowl, pitcher and an extra calabash of water for bathing furnished the cubicle.

Over the bed hung a little bronze crucifix with a sconce and a half-burned candle under it. One narrow window set high and deeply recessed in the stone wall, and with the flat iron bars of a prison across it, furnished light and air.

As the porters set down the bags they crossed themselves and reverently bowed and kissed the father's hand as they passed out. When they were gone the American stood in the middle of the floor looking grayly at his new quarters. He smiled faintly at the priest.

"This is a funny place for me to come to, Father Benicio."

"I hope you may find peace here, my son."

"Why—ye-e-s—" assented Strawbridge vaguely.

The words lingered in his thoughts a moment—"to find peace." The phrase really held no significance for him.

Weary from his exertions, the sick man sat down on the side of the bed. When he touched the mattress he was surprized to find it stuffed with straw.

"That," explained his host gravely, "is to remind us of One Who was born in a manger, my son."

He glanced toward the crucifix and bowed his head.

The drummer looked at the little bronze carving and the half-burned candle below it. The world of thought and emotion which the image symbolized was utterly foreign to him.

Now this supporting symbol of the straw in his bed aroused a faint curiosity in the salesman. He put a question to the priest with the simplicity of his kind.

"You talking about this bringing me peace? How can it bring anybody peace? What's the idea?"

Father Benicio answered him just as simply and fundamentally— "You must know that Christ died for your sins, my son."

"M—y-e-s," admitted the American without conviction.

He had heard that phrase all his life, from Salvation Army workers, from revivalists, from country preachers. It seemed to him to be a sort of phrase which they interjected into their homilies at intervals and which meant nothing at all.

Father Benicio stood studying the drummer. He went on carefully:

"Now that you are so deeply hurt, my son, you can carry your wounds to Him in meditation and have them healed. You remember that He healed the maimed, the halt and the blind on the shores of Galilee. He forgave the woman of Samaria.

"He is just as great and merciful at this moment, my son, here in this cubicle, as He was two thousand years ago. If you will only break your heart before Him, if you will acknowledge yourself sinful and unworthy, then the blessed saints will take away your griefs and into your heart will descend the dove."

To Strawbridge this mysticism was simple confusion. Doves and broken hearts—they conveyed no idea whatever.

Father Benicio stood watching his face.

"When you reflect on your transgressions, my son, then you will thank God a hundred times that you escaped leading the woman you love into a life of adultery."

"But, father," asked Strawbridge unsteadily, "what is going to become of her?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean in this land of murder and crime, what will become of Dolores?"

"Ah my son, that lies with God."

The priest crossed himself.

"Yes, I know, but——"

To Strawbridge the priest's phrase meant it lay with chance, that nothing watched over the Spanish girl; but he could not profess such a sentiment to the father.

"She will be safe, my son."

"Are you sure, father?"

"I am quite sure, my son."

"But something could so easily happen to her! Everything is so uncertain here! You continually feel that it is all going to ruin. Why, in San Geronimo, I saw women shot—shot down. I saw a girl killed in her window. How in God's name am I going away and leave Dolores where——"

"Stop! Do you think yourself more powerful than God? Do you doubt He can protect her body if it pleases Him, or if He chooses to lay her body aside, would she not be still more safe?"

The priest's earnestness and simplicity brought Strawbridge a brief illusion that life did not end with his body, but that it stretched out in some mysterious sunshine beyond the physical facts of Canalejos, of Rio Negro, and indeed of the whole world. The bodies of men and women had an appearance of shells which contained reality and timelessness. And as for Dolores' body that was a small and a passing thing.

Father Benicio moved toward the door

and again invoked Strawbridge to meditation and repentance. When the priest had vanished the drummer's apprehension of the other world lingered a few minutes like a mirage; then it too disappeared. The sins which Father Benicio had recalled so vividly and which he had counseled Strawbridge to meditate upon presently faded into subconsciousness as having no connection with his present life, and his thoughts came back to Dolores.

For some time these thoughts held no definition, but formed a vague, miserable mood with the *señora* as the central association.

THE American restlessly pulled his straw bolster to the foot of the bed, lay back on it with his legs hanging off and gave himself up to staring at the little bronze Christ and the candle. The crucifix held dull high-lights which focused his gaze.

Presently he found himself reconstructing his whole intercourse with the *señora* from the very first night they had met. He thought it over step by step, wondering what he could have done so it would have led to a kindlier end. He recalled their meeting at breakfast, how he had watched her go to confessional; he recalled the first time he sat with her on the piazza and how he had tried to make her laugh.

These different incidents arose in his brain like culprits appearing before a bar and all pleading, "Not guilty." He wondered what he could have done to save their relations from this shattering wreck. It all appeared natural and inevitable.

It seemed to Strawbridge that their undoing really began with Dolores when she confessed their plans to the priest. The American had had an idea that a priest merely heard a confession and remained entirely inactive, just as one might drop a note in a letter-box—that would end the matter; but Father Benicio had acted promptly and with extraordinary insight. He had seized on exactly the implement to persuade the drummer. Only now did Strawbridge realize how astute the priest had been in hitting on exactly the rifles——

The drummer pulled his bolster to give his head a cool place to lie on. He drew a deep sigh and began once more at his point of departure, searching for a flaw in his conduct. The meeting—the breakfast—the piazza— Here his brain skipped an interval, and he wondered if he could not have eloped with the *señora* and still have obtained the order for rifles. He took the point up carefully. The dictator needed the arms; Dolores was a matter of indifference to the dictator. He would hardly have allowed her abduction to stand in the way of a trade.

Here the drummer began thinking hard of a safe way in which he might have abducted the *señora* and still have sold the rifles. The Tollivers might have helped him. If he and Dolores could have reached the English ranch, they could have slipped into Federal territory while George Tolliver negotiated the trade.

Strawbridge moved his pillow restlessly and wondered why he had not done that. He lay thinking hard with his eyes fixed on the shining points of the crucifix.

Felipe had been a possibility. If Strawbridge had explained everything to Felipe, the bull-fighter would have pushed the whole matter through on yesterday afternoon instead of waiting overnight and allowing Dolores to trap them by a confession to the priest. With Felipe they could have fled to San Geronimo, and the *torero* could have brought back a letter arranging the order for rifles. But because he had not thought of these simple expedients he would have to travel to the ends of the earth, while she, the woman he loved and who loved him, would be held by the dictator to shame.

The drummer writhed and clutched an edge of the straw mattress. He stared with a suffering face at the crucifix. Out of the depth of his soul was he repenting his sins. For what are sins but the mistakes which have worked pain in a man's life? And what is repentance but grief and a turning away from those mistakes? The only difference between the repentance of a saint and the chagrin of a cutpurse caught in the toils of the law is the class of mistakes in their lives which brings them pain, and from which in spirit they turn.

XXIV

AT SOME point in his vigil Thomas Strawbridge must have gone to sleep, for at some other point he awoke with a start, impelled toward some end by a feeling of violent urgency. What it was that was so imperious for him to do he did not know.

His apprehensions danced among train schedules, ship sailings and business engagements. He thought that he was in some small-town hotel and that the night clerk had allowed him to oversleep. He reached out, expecting to touch a chairful of clothes when he discovered that he was already dressed.

Then in the darkness above him he saw a lighted candle and a crucifix. Only these two objects were visible, and they stood out, swimming in a black immensity. They put to flight all theories of locality.

He sat staring at the candle and the cross, trying to orient himself when with an eery feeling the darkness about him seemed to move, to fashion itself into his true surroundings. He was in a cubicle in the priest's house again.

Now that he had placed himself he knew what had aroused in him such an imperious call to action. It was his engagement to fly with the *señora* which the priest had set aside. In the profound stillness of the stone chamber he sat brooding on the fact that on this very night he would have embarked with Dolores on the black reaches of the Rio Negro. Perhaps already he would have started.

At the thought he fumbled beneath his pillow, drew out his watch, then got up, pinched the shroud off the candle and looked at the time. What he saw was the result of the simplest psychology, but it filled the American with a sense of the uncanny. He had waked precisely on the dot of eleven, on the very moment of his engagement to fly with the *señora.*

The coincidence seemed portentous to the drummer. It was a signal from some ghostly entity for him to pursue his plans; why else should he have awaked at exactly the appointed hour?

He stood beside his bed looking at the minute hand creep slowly past the dot. At the *palacio* he knew that Dolores also was looking at the hand of her watch, marking the slow passage of the very pip of their plans. He knew that she, too, was filled with the same violent urgency which moved him, that her access of formal morality must, like his own, have waned under the surge and desire of the night.

In the dim light he saw his bags which the porters had brought. He moved across, chose the one which contained the canvas roll prepared against his voyage and silently opened it.

He drew out the package. His heart beat; his lips grew dry. He listened as if he were robbing the suit-cases. Once or twice he hurt his sore hand, but he hardly noticed it. When he had his roll he looked at the watch again. It was two minutes past eleven.

The drummer wore American shoes with rubber heels. He stepped noiselessly into the passageway and moved toward the entrance. He saw a dim illumination in the large room latticed off from the patio. The air in the house was still warm.

He moved forward carefully, hoping to find no one in the faintly lighted chamber. He was perhaps half-way down the narrow passage when suddenly a tremendous clangor filled the whole house. It roared and boomed with gigantic reverberations. The very walls seemed shaken with it.

Strawbridge almost dropped his bundle. It was an alarm because he had stolen out of his room. It was some damnable device of Father Benicio who would shock the whole city with sound if he but moved. But a moment's saner thought told him it was the carillon of the cathedral ringing for some nocturnal mass.

The clangor had hardly died away in heavy, monotonous strokes when the whole house was filled with a sense of movement. A rustling of straw mattresses, the shuffle of *alpargatas,* the faintly vocalized yawns of waking men. A little later robed figures came out of the different cubicles bearing candles.

These were sleepy priests. Each bore his candle high so its rays fell on his shaven poll and on the shoulders and breast of his cassock; the rest was lost in shadows. They might have been a company of heads and shoulders floating about in darkness.

Some yawned patiently; others stretched and rubbed their eyes and otherwise dispelled their drowsiness. They whispered a little among themselves, and soon an air of concern animated the whole brotherhood.

As Strawbridge stood with his bundle, hemmed by priests behind and before, a hand was placed on his arm.

"Are you going into the cathedral, my son?" asked Father Benicio's voice. "We are going to hold a mass for the dead."

The salesman was taken aback.

"For the dead?" he aspirated.

"Some one has died in La Fortuna. Father Jaime was on watch, and he has just seen a corpse thrown into the river."

Strawbridge was shocked; he was more deeply shocked that this thing had happened on the very night and at the very hour when he and the *señora* would have made their flight. He fancied the soldiers coming down to the water's edge with a dead man at the moment he and the Spanish girl were passing in their boat. What a grim precursor of their honeymoon!

"Did they murder him?" he queried.

"I don't know. He may have died of disease or as a result of former torture."

The American moistened his lips; to torture, to murder, to fling their victims into the river! The horror of Rio Negro, the misery of all Venezuela, jellied around the drummer's heart.

"Are you going with us into the cathedral?" questioned the priest again.

The drummer was seized by a revulsion to all his slynesses and unstraight forwardness.

"Why, no, father," he said in a tired voice. "I'm going back to the *palacio*. I can't stick it out any longer. I was just going back when those bells broke loose and——"

"What are you going to do there, my son?" interposed the priest.

"I—well, I'm going to try to get the *señora* to go with me after all."

He paused, looking at the father and added with a touch of faint defiance:

"All this stuff about heaven and hell; that's all right for them that like it—I don't mean to be disrespectful to any man's religion. I was brought up to respect every faith—Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist—they're all all right if a man lives up to 'em."

The American finished his strange declaration of catholicity. He felt better now that he had told the priest of his intentions. He let his bundle down frankly into his good hand and nodded at the father.

"Well, good-by and good luck. I thank you for what you tried to do for me. I know your intentions were of the best. So long."

And he turned away.

The priest had stood perfectly still through this outburst, looking at the American with an impassive face. Now he made a step after Strawbridge and touched his arm.

"My son, you can't take her now," he said in a queer voice.

Something in his manner stopped the drummer, puzzled him and filled him with a vague apprehension.

"Why?"

"She is out of your reach forever."

The drummer's eyes widened; his mouth dropped open.

"You—you don't mean she is dead?" he whispered.

"She is to you. She vowed to enter her novitiate as a Sister of Mercy this afternoon."

The American's bowels seemed to sag inside of him. A weak feeling flooded his body and shook his knees.

"Dolores is going to be a nun!"

"My son, what other place was there for so bruised a heart? Only our holy church can offer her peace."

Strawbridge stood breathing heavily through his open mouth. The priests had formed a line and now they were marching through a door which led directly into the cathedral. Father Benicio bowed his head and turned to fall into the last place in the rank. The line of candle-bearers disappeared one by one into the dark vastitude of the cathedral.

The American stood motionless in the faintly lighted room watching them go. Presently from afar off he could hear the first melancholy responses of a mass for the repose of the dead.

XXV

THE novitiate of Dolores Fombombo was Fortune's shrewdest thrust at Thomas Strawbridge. After that he stayed on at the priest's house because it ceased to make any difference to him where he domiciled.

He spent most of his days there with the priests, sitting in the patio or lying on his straw bed in the cubicle. Now and then when he saw his bags he would think to himself—

"I ought to take some samples and my order book and canvas this town again."

At other times he would think—

"I ought to write a report to my house."

But his feeling of "oughtness" applied to a perfectly empty motor impulse for execution. It was precisely as if he were a figure without any will whatsoever.

Queer to say, he did not think overmuch of Dolores. Occasionally when his mind made a movement toward her he had a terrifying feeling as if some chasm were opening before him. Then almost immediately it seemed as if his brain closed gently shut, the chasm vanished and with it all thought of the girl. To say that he grieved for the girl would be an impropriety. He had been numbed.

The most trifling things were sufficient to catch the drummer's unanchored attention. His eyes would follow the priest's cat across the patio, or he would watch the slow march of the cathedral's shadow over the flagstones in the *calle*.

He became acquainted with the priests who were domiciled in the building. These included his Grace the bishop, Father Honorio, a big, sleek, solemn man with swinging jowls that were bluish from a closely shaved beard. Father Roberto was a close-lipped cleric with a continual disapproving expression. Then there was Father Pedro, a fat, unaspiring priest who drank enough wine at his noon meals to make him sleepy all the afternoon.

There was still a fifth priest at the priests' house who was not attached to the cathedral at all. This was Father Jaime, a sort of itinerant guest who had come to the Canalejos cathedral from a Trappist monastery on Lake Titicaca in Peru. The bishop allowed Father Jaime a few pittances for holding mass at the funerals of his humbler parishioners, and this was the only stipend he received. When Strawbridge knew him he was trying to save sufficient money to purchase the churchman's half-fare passage from Canalejos to Port au Spain in Trinidad, where the Benedictines had a monastery.

The man who rang the cathedral bells, an office which occurred at almost every hour of the day, was called the "Cock." His nickname came perhaps from a thin, beak-like nose protruding from under the dirty vizor of an old cap. He had a Jewish appearance.

He was the only object which aroused to wrath the lethargic children of the cathedral settlement. When the Cock appeared the children spat at him and called him blood-sucker and all manner of insulting epithets. The reason of this contumely was the Cock lent money in a small way, and the hatred poor people have for a parsimonious money-lender was reflected in their children.

The Cock lived with a very industrious Indian wife in one of the adobes at the back of the cathedral. He seldom spoke to any one, but moved gloomily on his way to and from his bells.

However, once Strawbridge did observe a visitor in the bell-ringer's hut. One day as the salesman was walking slowly along one of the paths on the terrane of the river a gay figure stepped out from the blackness of the Cock's hut, drew off his sombrero and bowed to the American with undeniable grace. As he bowed he exhibited a knot of hair on the back of his head.

"How does *el señor, mi general!*" he called warmly. "Be assured Felipe knows your unhappiness, *señor*, and that you have but to lift a finger and the sword of a bull-fighter will leap from its scabbard——"

He went through the pantomime of drawing his sword, and his bold figure, set against the darkness of the door, formed a picture.

The sick man looked at him, thought of his walk with Felipe in the plaza, Esteban's fight in the *palacio*—Madruja—Such reminiscences were leading him straight to the *señora* when some involuntary check in his mind softly closed that stream of thought and left the drummer staring emptily at the *torero's* posturing. He turned away along the paths, vaguely disturbed and unhappy. The bull-fighter turned and nodded knowingly at some one inside the hut.

"*Caramba!*" he praised. "What did I tell you? Deep! Why, you can't tell by his face that he knows even me, and yet—we are as brothers! What a dictator that *hombre* will make!"

THE cathedral itself was a kind of labyrinth through which Strawbridge sometimes wandered with a sort of dulled attention. He understood little of the ecclesiastical symbolism in the chapels and on the high altar or the allegorical frescoes in the dome and pendentive. He did peruse the fourteen stations of the Passion which spaced the interior walls of the church, and while he could not follow the details, he did understand their general purport.

He never entered the Chapel of the Last Supper. Something warned him from the place where he had stood with Dolores under Michelena's great masterpiece.

This unfortunately was the only worthy canvas which the cathedral of Canalejos contained. The other chapels held staring images of one saint or another, and near the entrance of the pile, on the right side, was a crude picture of souls in purgatory. It was so badly done; it was not even hideous.

The altars of the more popular saints were piled with *ex-voto* offerings. These were all manner of little images, made of tin, silver or gold, and not much larger than a tobacco tag. They were images of legs, hearts, arms, feet, a little tin mule or a tiny house. Each one commemorated a miracle performed by the saint on whose altar it lay.

A little silver leg was probably the gift of some rheumatic whom the good saint had cured; a mule would illustrate the gratitude of some peon for finding a strayed burro. The simplicity and childlikeness of these little gifts touched even Strawbridge, and moreover such an accumulation of testimonials gave an air of credibility to the power of the images in the chapels.

Besides these offerings of gratitude, on each altar were piles of letters asking the saint for further interventions. Once as Strawbridge was looking at these missives, he wondered if any real power lay back of these stiff images of saints. Could it be that behind them was ranged some sort of spiritual reality with a power and a will to soften human unhappinesses?

The thought stirred the benumbed heart of the American. He stood staring up at the wooden effigy with a notion of adding a petition of his own to the pile on the altar.

The idea moved him in a queer way. He walked out of the side entrance of the cathedral into the priests' house. His legs trembled with his idea. In his cubicle he got out pen and paper and sat down to write when a queer thing stopped him. All of his stationery bore the letter-head of his company.

It struck the drummer as incongruous to write a note to Saint John in heaven on New York letter-heads. And now that he had started to use his own envelope it was impossible to go out deliberately and purchase the big square Latin-American envelopes such as the peons used to write a letter to Saint John. In brief, the sight of his matter-of-fact American paper shattered his transitory mysticism and made it impossible. However, the dying of this hope left the drummer grayer than ever.

The wood carving in the cathedral next offered itself to Strawbridge's faint interest. The circular balustrade which led up and around one of the columns of the nave to the pulpit and the canopy over the pulpit were carved out of mahogany with the *motif* of pineapples and yucca palm.

The wood was black with the centuries. Strawbridge thought this was a defect, but when he recognized the two plants intertwined in the carving his discovery gave him a childish joy. It led him to look at other work, the choir stalls, which were not half so well done as the pulpit; the reredos, the altar panels, the pyx.

Everywhere his eye fell he saw the labor of generations. Some of it was the carving of the old Spanish artizans who came to the New World not long after Columbus; others were the work of the Indian and negro apprentices of those original old wood-carvers. The whole rise and decline of a folk art was epitomized in the old cathedral at Canalejos.

At some period in the seventeenth century wood-carving in Spanish Venezuela reached its apogee. Who those masters were is now lost in oblivion. Some native artist produced the indigenous designs of watermelon and pineapple, palm and yucca, which are spread throughout Spanish tropical America.

Today this carving is found everywhere; in chairs, sideboards, four-posters, churches, mansions and huts. It is as pervasive as mangoes and as beautiful as Heppelwhite; it had its rise in chastity and its decline in vulgarity; but what genius it was who originated these designs and moved millions of the human race with pleasure, nobody knows. It is a folk art, scattered no doubt by negro journeymen or even slaves; for the same motives are spread all over the West Indies, and from the Mosquito Coast to the Spanish Main.

ABOUT a week after Strawbridge came to the priest's house he was walking in the cathedral one afternoon and wandered through an open door into an anteroom full of the images which the priests used in their processionals. It was rather a queer sight, the madonnas with dust on their gilt haloes; Saint Peter holding up a tarnished key; Saint Thomas reaching a broken finger toward the far-off wounds of Christ. These and perhaps a dozen other dusty figures, all as large as life, were placed helterskelter in the storeroom, some facing in one direction, some another.

Over in a corner lay three or four litters on which the images were borne. One had a glass frame; another was draped in silks. The whole thing was rather a queer sight, these saints in retirement, poor old effigies, with the glory of the processionals quite over and badly in need of paint and gilt.

The drummer stood looking curiously about him when he heard a rustling among the images. He moved toward the sound and after a moment saw an old woman dusting the statues with a brush. A second glance showed him it was Josefa's grandmother. This dusting no doubt was a part of her labor as a charwoman in the cathedral.

Presently the old crone observed Strawbridge. She looked at him until she recognized the American, then put down her duster.

"*Ca!* It is you, *señor*. I thought it was Felipe come in to help me. Have you come to tell me something?"

Strawbridge explained that he was merely idling in the cathedral; then he asked her how she liked her quarters by this time.

"It keeps the rain away. Then you have nothing to tell me of poor Josefa?"

"No, Doña Consolacion—at least not yet," he added in order to give some crumbs of hope.

The old woman mumbled her wrinkled mouth with nervousness.

"But you will soon?"

"I hope so, Doña Consolacion."

"Very soon?"

"I hope so."

She nodded, "*Sí, sí;* I hope so. I pray so every night, *señor*, at my *oracions*."

She gave the Virgin a stroke with her brush, then added in a very low tone and helped the drummer understand by forming the words very plainly with her thin wrinkled lips—

"Who—was—it—the—soldiers—dropped—in—the—river—the—other—night?"

The question brought the drummer a wave of surprize and revived pain.

"I—I don't know, *señora!*"

The old woman gave up her dusting and came nearer so she could talk in a whisper.

"You don't think, you don't believe i-it could h-have b-been—" she gasped and cut off her sentence.

"You mean——"

She nodded mutely with a terrified expression in her old eyes.

"Why, no, Doña Consolacion, I am sure it was not—not your grandson!"

But Doña Consolacion was peering at him and his face was too full of apprehension to reassure her. On the contrary, with the suspicion of the aged she read tragedy there. She suddenly dropped her duster, and her face screwed up into the tearless grimacing which stands for weeping with the aged.

"Oh *Dios mio*, my Josefa, my poor little Josefa is gone!"

She rocked to and fro with her hands crossed over her dried breast. Suddenly something flared up in her and she pointed at Strawbridge.

"And you did it! You killed him! It makes no difference to me if it was all a part of a plan to free this country. I would rather have my little Josefa than free a thousand countries!"

Strawbridge made a gesture.

"But listen, *señora*, there is no reason to think it was Josefa! He was young and strong! He wouldn't have succumbed so quickly. There must be hundreds of prisoners in that jail. It is more likely one of them has died than—than your grandson—some old man whose strength had broken down!"

The old woman grew quieter at this reasoning and stood looking at Strawbridge with her toothless lips moving in and out with her agitated breathing.

"Holy Mary, I hope you are right! If I only knew he was alive! But he was young and strong as you say——"

She gave him a look. "*Ca!* But I don't see why you should have chosen him, Señor Strawbridge, to cast into prison even if it is all a part of your terrible plans——"

"But, dear Doña Consolacion," begged the drummer, "it was no part of a plan—there was no plan to it. It was simply an unfortunate move, an accident."

The old charwoman shook her head.

"*Ca, señor,* there is no use deceiving me. I am not a spy but an old woman cast down by a tyrant. And my family have always been lovers of freedom. My father was a Rosales."

Her old voice gathered dignity at this reference to her family; and then, nodding her head to stress her words, she added —

"And poor Ricardo, whom you had shot, Señor Strawbridge, he was my grand-nephew."

The American stared in amazement.

"Ricardo—whom I had shot!"

"*Sí, señor;* Lieutenant Rosales, whom you ordered shot in San Geronimo. *Pues,* you need not stare so. I understand all. Felipe has explained your deep and mysterious plans that reach all over the world.

"And also Felipe explained that one can not make an omelet without breaking eggs. Napoleon first said that, *señor*—all cruel men say it. But I do not complain. I was born a Rosales, and more than one of us has given himself to die."

The old woman's persistent delusion that he was some sort of arch plotter assigning this and that man to his fate filled the drummer with dismay.

"But, *señora,*" he began hopelessly, "how many times have I said that I have nothing, nothing whatever to do with all this butchery? I would not harm a soul in Rio Negro, no, not for the whole Government. I would not——"

But the old creature shook her head with her mouth quirked in withered satire.

"*Ola, señor!*"

She wagged a finger.

"I know, I know."

She started to stoop for her brush, but the drummer forestalled her.

"I know one little thing that tells me all, no matter what you admit or deny."

Strawbridge looked at her.

"What's that?"

"I refer to——"

She wagged her head vaguely and looked at the American with narrowed and disapproving eyes.

"What are you talking about, Doña Consolacion?"

"I was down at the riverside on the night when the soldiers flung the body of the dead man into the water."

The salesman stood staring at her with his brows drawn in a faint frown.

"Well—what of that?"

"Oh, what of that! I was at the riverside just below the *palacio,* Señor Strawbridge, where the white boat lay. I went down because the Cock told me I could find some driftwood there, and I had no money to buy charcoal——"

THE phrase "white boat" moved some memory that had been battened down in Strawbridge's heart. It gave him a ghastly sensation as if an arm should have reached out of a grave. And there was something disconcerting in the rancor in the crone's voice, in the circumstantiality with which she began her account. He stood looking at her, wondering and rather fearing what she was about to say.

"What's the point to this?" he hesitated at last. "What if you were at the river—under the *palacio?*"

The charwoman found enough spirit to shrug.

"No matter how grand your final object may be, *señor,* I think that was going a little too far. There are certain things a Spanish *caballero* will not do, *señor;* no, not though he gain all Venezuela by it!"

The drummer took a step nearer the old woman and looked hard at her.

"Look here, Consolacion," he uttered in a strained voice. "What—in—the——— —are—you—talking—about?"

The ancient shrugged again, and the nostrils of her hatchety old nose dilated momentarily. Then she burst out:

"*Dios mio,* I am talking about the *señora,* poor Doña Dolores, whom I found down there, poor lamb, frightened almost to death and weeping. She started to fly as I came up; but I called to her, and she knew I was a woman——"

A ghastly sensation trickled through Strawbridge. He clutched the old creature's arm.

"The *señora!*" he whispered, staring with distended eyes. "My God, you can't mean Dolores was down there that night, on the river!"

The hag broke into a sardonic, clacking laughter.

"No—oh, no; you didn't know that! You didn't know you had a poor, frightened girl go down to the river-bank and wait and pray for your coming until it grew so light she was forced back into the *palacio!* No, you didn't know that!

"Oh, to be sure I explained to her your plans. I told her that she was just a tiny little part; that you had killed my grandnephew and my grandson, and now for some reason you had flung her down in the river mud like an old rag—you and your great plans——"

The old crone's tirade seemed to break loose something hot and seething in Strawbridge's brain. The enormity of his delinquence, the pitifulness of the girl, the rapture which might have been his!

His legs shook so that he caught at the effigy of the Blessed Virgin. But all that remained of his mutilated hand were two fingers. These gave way instantly; he staggered against the wooden figure, and the effigy swung slowly over and crashed on the tiles.

The ancient shifted from the dowager back to the servant again.

"Look! Look!" she squealed. "Oh, look what you've done—you've broken her head!"

The American neither saw nor heard the fall of the effigy.

"But, *señora,*" he stuttered with a salty taste in his mouth, "he—he told me—Father Benicio told me that she—she had gone to a convent!"

The hag came out of her servant's concern for the statue and fell to lashing again.

"A priest told you! *Diantre!* Poor little dove, she did join the sisterhood, Señor Strawbridge, but it was on the afternoon after your cruel desertion of her. What else could she do—poor little dove!"

"But the priest! The priest!" cried Strawbridge, shaking her arm.

Suddenly he flung her loose.

"Where is he! Where is he!" he shouted. "That priest called Benicio!"

This big American turned for the entrance of the cathedral. As he staggered into the gloom and stillness of the great pile his voice went up an octave shivering with rage.

"Benicio! Benicio!" he howled. "Where in the —— is Benicio!"

XXVI

THOMAS STRAWBRIDGE went through the cathedral with legs that shook and hands that clutched at nothing. He screwed himself to sufficient self-control to be silent as he shivered along the aisles, peering into every chapel and niche for Father Benicio.

He raged internally what he would do to Father Benicio. He syncopated his thoughts with clenchings of fists, spreading of nostrils and muttered blasphemies. When he found the priest, throttled him, beat his shaven head on the stone flags— Vibrations of wrath shook through his chest and belly.

He made the entire round of both aisles and then turned automatically into the priests' house. He walked faster and faster with a rising fear of not finding the father at all.

He tried to reason away this hurry. He told himself he must certainly find the fellow at last; he must certainly twist his hand in Benicio's black stock and kill him; but these very thoughts sent him striding along faster than ever.

He opened a door and stepped quickly into the big room with the latticed side. He glanced about with a beating heart and saw that it was empty.

He got to the entrance of the bishop's room and looked in. Only the Christ on the cross and the darkened pictures of former bishops looked down on him. The drummer turned and set out up the narrow passage to search among the cubicles.

At that moment a loud ringing of the gong at the outer door caught his attention. It came a succession of three clangorous peals, loud and imperative. It suggested an interruption and sent Strawbridge trotting up the passage, looking hurriedly into each cubicle. All were as obviously empty as a cigar-box. Some smelled of burned candles, one of medicine, one or two of stale bedding. The only difference between them was of odor.

The doorbell clanged again three times. Then it suddenly occurred to Strawbridge that this might be Father Benicio asking entrance. The thought sent him flying to the door with titillating nerves. He began whispering through his dry mouth:

"Good God, let it be him! Let it be that devil, Benicio!"

He stepped into the entrance and closed the shutter softly behind him. At that moment the gong filled the closed passageway with a great uproar. It was imperative, excited, and held the prolonged clangor of a visitor who is at the end of his patience.

The drummer rushed to the door, laid

noiseless hands on the bolts. He had a sensation of immense strength. He wanted not to frighten the priest, but to let him come unwarned into his grip.

Not until Strawbridge set about drawing the bolts did he remember that he had but one hand. A thought flickered in his head that he might need his automatic; this was gone almost instantly.

The bolts were hot. He could feel the heat vibrating from the panels from the sunshine outside. With a painful surge of expectancy he swung open the shutters. In the dazzle of sunshine stood a figure who the drummer could see was not Father Benicio. His murderous impulse had been so sure of the priest that he stood batting his eyes in the glare when he heard an excited voice gasp,

"*Gracias Dios*, it's you, Señor Strawbridge! *Diantre!* I thought I would never get you! But *caramba!* You know it already! Look! Look, Esteban, how white his face is and how bloodshot his eyes! We were two great fools, Esteban, to imagine we could tell *el señor* anything!"

A second figure stepped in front of the door-casing and shrugged.

"*Naturalmente*, Felipe, if *el señor general* ordered these boats up here he knew when they were coming."

"But what shall we do, *mi general?*" demanded the bull-fighter excitedly. "Are you ready for us peons? Just a word and we will flame up like a bonfire!"

The *torero* made a swift upward gesture.

Such ejaculations and questions were enough to seize part of the attention of even the homicidal drummer.

"What are you talking about? Boats—men—peons!"

"*Diantre!*" roared Rubito in admiration. "Is he not as deep as the devil's pit, Esteban! What are we talking about? *Pues, mi general*, we are talking about your men and your boats, your guns; they are below the rapids. They are gathering in from God knows where.

"When we saw them coming Esteban and I came running here as fast as our legs would carry us to know when you wanted us peons here in Canalejos to strike. Is it now? Is this the day? Shall we set fire to —— now? How is it, *mi general?* Now!"

The bull-fighter's cries vibrated with a curious edge. He whipped out an imaginary sword and saluted, tossing up his head and knot of hair.

"What part of Canalejos do we sack first? Send me where there are plenty of women!"

Esteban stood nodding with his stupid peon face.

"And me—send me where I can find Madruja, *mi general*."

By this time Strawbridge had fathomed what had set off the imaginations of his self-appointed henchmen. He made a heavy gesture.

"That isn't my flotilla. It's the dictator's boats come up from Rio at last."

He stood staring at his two followers with a new and profound depression coming over him.

"So this is the end of it! This is the end of everything!"

A great sigh burst from the drummer; he struck his palm miserably against his breast.

"Oh, good God! Well, I'm ready to go."

He stumbled out of the priests' house. Each of the bewildered peons took one of his arms at his unsteady gait, and the three men set out around the buttresses of the cathedral and the adobe lean-tos toward the terrane of the river. The pain of a complete and final leave-taking of Dolores was upon Strawbridge. The peons had not the least notion of the cause of their master's despair.

"But *mi general*," demurred Felipe uncertainly, "there are too many canoes for the trading-party; the river is black with them. *Caramba*, if they are not your men——"

"*Es verdad, señor mi general*," put in Esteban. "There are too many——"

THE peon's words were interrupted by a sharp, crashing blow from the direction of the river. It smote the eardrums of the trio terrifically and was followed by an abrupt silence. It was a cannon-shot.

At the moment the three men trotted around the last obscuring adobe that stuck to the cathedral. On La Fortuna they saw a puff of smoke dissolving into air, and far down below the rapids they saw a crawling of men from a multitude of canoes. They were so far away the men looked like insects. Among these insect lines forming on the shore Strawbridge caught the gleam of a banner.

The cannon on La Fortuna crashed again. Soldiers went marching out of the fort toward the foot of the rapids. They went down the terrane of the river at a double quick.

A feeling of movement and stir spread over the whole city. Almost before Strawbridge knew it, the whole terrane on which he stood was covered with denizens of the adobes.

The Cock came out, peered through the sunshine, then darted back into his inky hut and reappeared with an extraordinary single-barreled muzzle-loading pistol and a dagger. Men and women came running out of the plaza to the riverside for a view.

Felipe clutched the drummer's arm .

"You see, *mi general*, it is your men attacking. What shall I do? Gather up my men and advance?"

Some obscure cerebration caused Strawbridge to answer:

"No—no, not now. Wait till we see how this goes."

The bull-fighter snapped his fingers in admiration.

"*Caramba*, Esteban!" he cried above the noise of the gathering crowd. "What calmness! This is the strategy of a Napoleon!"

By this time the gun on La Fortuna was firing regularly, and far down the river among the insects little plumes of smoke showed where the shells were bursting.

Strawbridge left the river-bank and made his way through the crowd toward the plaza. He was filled with a rising anxiety for the *señora*. He wondered where she was, to what convent she had retired. He supposed that she would be safe, but she would surely be frightened. The drummer went hurrying eastward through a small *calle*, glancing to right and to left, half-expecting to see the *señora's* face at some barred window.

Along the thoroughfares natives were darting about, salvaging their household goods as if from a fire. Women and children turned out into the streets with burdens on their backs and went hurrying along, urged by the groaning of the cannon and an occasional dry rattle of musketry.

This continued from street to street, and by the time the drummer reached the plaza the square was already crowded with fugitives, all of whom were flowing westward past the *palacio* and the State buildings toward the outskirts of town and the llanos. The mass moved slowly and in great disorder. Mules and donkeys went past laden with household goods; carts, containing food, *mosquiteroes*, calabashes, invalided persons; pedestrians struggled along under huge bundles done up in ponchos; old women carried their belongings twisted up in their skirts, with their bare legs and feet exposed. It was an astonishing, frantic procession with every one struggling, pushing, cursing unfortunates who could not move quickly.

Perched on top many a bundle rode pet game-cocks. The shrill crowing of these fowls added a queer stridor to the turmoil of the refugees.

Almost every shop around the plaza was shut solidly now. One or two doors had been forced by looters, and the riffraff of the street eddied into these magazines as if by some law of nature and streamed out again with their arms filled with spoil.

In the midst of this pillaging and flight a murmur, which swiftly rose to cries, oaths and shouts of anguish, came from the direction of the *palacio*. It grew louder and louder, and presently the drummer was aware that the crowd about him was solidifying and surging backward.

Strawbridge tried to find out what was the matter, but he could ask nothing in the uproar. Within the space of a minute he was caught in a dense jam and had to struggle merely to keep his feet. He held his sore hand up to prevent its being hurt and tried to push his way in some direction, but men and women were crushing into him on every side.

Then owing to his height he saw the danger. Down the square the palace guards were coming at a double quick in the direction of the fighting. The front ranks had leveled their bayonets to force a swift passage through the mob. Before the steel the crowd flung itself back shrieking in terror and pain. The masses crushed blindly toward the sides of the square, lost their bundles, upset carts, bastinadoed their burros and flung themselves in compact masses away from the line of march.

As the guards plowed down the plaza Strawbridge felt himself crushed one way, then another, and then suddenly a line of division opened and left him with half a dozen others directly in the middle of the way. He was in a narrow alley through which the bayonets were double quicking.

He had that terrible sensation of being unable to move in either direction.

He stood dodging in a mad contra-dance; then when he seemed lost, he dashed to one side and tried to press his body into a solid wall of flesh. He might as well have tried to sink into a bank of rubber.

He stood out; he was still exposed. The bristle of bayonets was right on him. He made a last convulsive effort to merge himself, when an arm thrust out of the mass, hooked about his waist, and from some leverage pried the American into a niche at the very moment the bayonets skimmed smoothly past.

The crush stood perfectly immobile as the regiment went by. A sweat broke out on Strawbridge. He twisted his head to look at the palace guards.

Only a few days ago they had been little better than servants who fetched and carried for him; now at a cannon-shot, at a volley of firearms, they had formed a machine which accidentally, casually, almost had transfixed him. Their passage left sweat dripping down the drummer's face as if he had been douched with water.

The moment the soldiers were passed, the crowd filled the *calle* again, struggling with greater violence than ever. A voice shouted in Strawbridge's ear.

"Where are you trying to go?"

Strawbridge looked about and saw a bearded and somewhat familiar face. It belonged to the man who had wedged him into the crowd. Then the drummer recognized him as a Dr. Delgoa, one of the Government officials whom he had seen once or twice at the *palacio*. The doctor's face had a strained look, and now in the press he still held Strawbridge's arm, perhaps with an idea of directing the drummer's steps.

"I wasn't going anywhere specially," shouted the American. "Trying to find out what's the trouble?"

The doctor shook his head.

"*Diantre!* This is terrible! Come with me; I am going to the *palacio*. Here! A side street; let's get into this side street. —— this crush!"

These exclamations were jogged out of him as he edged his body into this and that aperture. He made way for the drummer, who followed him body to body, and at last succeeded in pushing himself into the mouth of a stinking little side *calle*.

In this place the crowd dwindled to small groups and single pedestrians who hurried back and forth with ant-like aimlessness. Dr. Delgoa rested a moment. He wore a high hat; now he took it off, drew out a silk handkerchief and mopped his face and hair. Somehow he had managed to preserve his silk hat, his black frock and his pearl-gray trousers very uncrumpled considering his struggle.

"We'll have to get away from here!" he said in a breath. "This *calle* will be untenable in thirty minutes— The machine guns——"

He started walking along the *calle* with the stragglers.

"*Caramba*, I wish I knew which way the cat'll jump," he puffed, moving along and drying his hat-band as he went. "One never knows what to do. I left my wife Alicia at home. Of course the telephones have been seized and I can't talk to her. Where are you going, Señor Strawbridge?"

He had evidently forgot the drummer's answer to this same question a minute or two before.

"I'm trying to find out what caused this."

The American looked back and listened to the inarticulate roar of the mob thundering in the tympanum of the narrow street.

Dr. Delgoa started to explain; but at that moment out of the back door of a shop bundled an old woman with a great pile of fiber hammocks. The men collided with her. The old creature spat invectives. She twisted about, saw who had struck her and became more furious.

"It's that thief Delgoa! That bloodsucker Delgoa! May a ray of God blast your entrails! You stole every centavo my shop could earn; you and your cursed police! May you be bayoneted through the liver!"

Her anathemas were finally lost in the uproar. They struck coldly on the drummer's nerves in such a perilous situation, but Delgoa paid no attention to her. He began shaking his head with his distressed look.

"If a man could only tell which way it is going to go!"

"Who is it fighting us?" called Strawbridge. "Have the Federal forces suddenly got up here?"

Delgoa looked around at him, rather surprized.

"No; it's Saturnino."

Strawbridge stared thunderstruck.

"Saturnino—fighting us!"

"Yes, yes; been brewing a long time. Very ambitious man. Heretofore the general has handled him somehow through the influence of the general's wife. Now I understand she has entered a convent, and of course—" the minister made a hopeless gesture—"of course that unchained ——"

A wide dismay suddenly swept over the drummer. He felt that he and all the people in Canalejos were caught like flies in the web of Coronel Saturnino's endless calculations. He knew that back there in San Geronimo the *coronel* had worked out night after night precisely how he would conquer this point and that redoubt, how many men it would require to take that coign of vantage, and so on, step after step all the way to his goal.

Suddenly the drummer turned to the minister.

"Why didn't Fombombo throw the *coronel* into prison years ago?"

Dr. Delgoa looked at him, his mind evidently coming back from some painful abstraction.

"Oh, yes—he couldn't. Saturnino has always been a favorite of the Army. Besides the general needed a tactician—*Diabolo!* I wish the general had kept his wife in the *palacio!*"

BY THIS time the two men had come to the mouth of the little side street where it emptied into the main thoroughfare opposite the *palacio.* Delgoa held out an arm to warn the drummer, then advanced carefully to the limit of the protecting walls and peered down the plaza.

The place was a litter of scattered goods and broken carts. Here and there a human figure darted across the wreckage, making for some place of safety. The crowd had struggled past and were gone.

Just across the street the doors of the *palacio* stood open. By each shutter were posted four soldiers, whose duty evidently was to close the building at a moment's notice. On top of the palace roof were lined a number of guards, and in the machicolations above the architrave shone the muzzles of some rapid-fire guns.

Dr. Delgoa stood in the *calle* peering at the scene before him and listening with all his ears. He said to Strawbridge in an apprehensive voice—

"The cannonading at La Fortuna has stopped."

The drummer listened. It was true, but he had not observed the fact under the ceaseless tearing sound of the small arms, which was growing louder and louder. It sounded somewhat like an approaching storm. Delgoa waved a hopeless hand.

"*Dios mio,* which way will this battle go! *Canastre!* This deciding for your life, your property and your family!"

He turned to Strawbridge with a tortured face.

"Just think, if I fail to guess the victor just once I go into La Fortuna, my property is confiscated and my wife——"

He snapped his fingers and flung out his hands.

Such a frank opportunism amazed the American.

"Why, —— it, man, stick to the side you think is right!"

"Right! *Right!*"

Delgoa laughed in a very access of irony.

"My dear *amigo,* I am a politician; I have nothing to do with——"

He interrupted himself to listen to the increased ripping and tearing of the gunfire; then he looked steadily at Strawbridge with his head cocked sidewise and whispered—

"I believe Saturnino is winning——"

The drummer was outraged.

"Well, by ——, between the two I stand by the general! I'm going across; I won't support a —— dog who is trying to run away with his employer's wife!"

"But look yonder!"

The minister pointed down the plaza.

"Yonder are the guards falling back!"

At that moment a flurry of men that looked like leaves before a wind whirled out of a street into the plaza and instantly settled into every niche and crevice they could find. Almost immediately came another whirl of men falling back behind every makeshift ambuscade. The minister gripped the American's arm.

"Your general is losing—we are going to change dictators!"

The American burst out in profanity:

"I don't give a ——! I've always been against Saturnino! He's nothing but a rascal, a —— clever rascal! Hasn't got a principle in him!"

The drummer shook off the doctor's arm and next moment darted out of his covert toward the long flight of steps at the entrance of the *palacio.*

The big American's flight might have been the signal for the whole regiment of palace guards to retreat headlong toward the *Presidencia.* Immediately a company of insurgents deployed into the square and knelt to fire.

Even in the drummer's short sprint across the *calle* the attackers discharged a volley. The crash, pent up between the houses, roared down the *calle,* and a shower of leaves and twigs fell from the ornamental greenery in the plaza. Stone flakes leaped from the façade of the *palacio;* spots of dust floated up into the air along the *calle;* the air was filled with a whining.

Here and there a flying guard stumbled in the plaza; two or three of the less severely wounded went crawling on their hands and knees toward the side streets to escape the steel storm. Strawbridge dashed up the long flight of steps and was hardly inside the recessed doors when the van of the retreating guard began to pour up the steps into the building.

The moment the drummer entered the *palacio* he stepped into quietude and order. The heavy walls reduced the rifle fire in the streets to a mere popping.

Along the passage were stationed some officers who directed the returning soldiers to march back into the building toward some objective unknown to the American. One or two of the officers recognized Strawbridge and saluted as he entered.

A queer feeling of homecoming visited the salesman as he stood near the entrance. His painful week at the priests' house seemed to have dropped out of his life. It seemed to him that the *señora* was still in the music-room, that he might walk back, tap and have her come to the door.

Bullets were snapping now regularly at the stone façade. They reminded Strawbridge of the first scattering drops of rain at the beginning of a Summer shower.

Another batch of soldiers came running up the long steps. One of them even laughed and waved his cap to some one on the roof, when at that moment he fell forward and lay twisting on the sharp corners of the stone steps.

Suddenly the drummer saw that it was Pambo, the little brown guard who had nursed him through his illness. His comrades left him on the steps.

An impulse sent the drummer leaping down three steps at a time through the whining air. He seized Pambo in his arms and came back up. The little soldier recognized the American, for he gasped out:

"*Ca! Señor Americano,* tell Juana——"

Then he began bending his body backward, thrusting out his chest in an effort for breath. When Strawbridge laid him on the floor he continued these convulsive movements, bowing up his torso, his mouth open, gasping, and his eyes staring.

The next moment the officer nearest the door looked and gave a command, and the four soldiers swung shut the heavy metallic doors. Instantly the hall was blanketed to silence. The only sounds were the footsteps of the guards walking briskly to the rear of the building and the clinking of balls striking the doors of the *palacio.*

The drummer fell in with the last soldiers who went down the hallway. Along the sides of the passage hung the dark portraits of former dictators, men who had usurped and lost power, and who had been done to death in just such another eruption as raged outside the *palacio.* The drummer hurried past these ironic pictures with a beating heart.

He meant to fight in the cause of General Fombombo. Why? He did not know. Perhaps it was because of the order for rifles. Perhaps because he sensed in the arbitrary general something finer than what he found in the cynical *coronel.* Or it more likely was the result of the salesman discovering that Saturnino was a lover of Dolores—the general was only her husband. Strawbridge fell in with the soldiers.

THE recruits turned into a side door of the passageway, and this gave on to a flight of stairs that led to the roof. Guards were pouring up and down this staircase; the upward-bound were laden with ammunition-boxes; the down-bound were empty-handed. This was the general's ammunition hoist from some donjon in the *palacio.*

The moment Strawbridge stepped on to the stairway a din of firing and shouting broke on to his ears. The salesman ran up the steps beside one burden-bearer. As they emerged on the roof one of the soldiers reached over and jerked the big American down to a stooping posture. Everybody was stooping. The palace guards crouched and sprawled inside the waist-high wall that surrounded the roof and fired through the machicolations.

Stationed here and there among the riflemen were machine guns. Each gun was handled by two men. Now and then one of these guns would break into a hard yammering, then abruptly cease.

The riflemen, too, were firing in the same careful way. They sighted and fired with murderous concentration. They were like all Latin-American revolutionists; they never used volley-firing in the hope of making a hit. Every bullet was aimed at somebody.

A dead man or two and a few wounded men were scattered over the tiled roof. Stone splinters snapped out of the merlons from adverse gunfire. The smell of smokeless powder filled the air with a headachey quality.

The drummer saw a rifle and a bandoleer of cartridges beside a motionless figure. He crawled to it and salvaged the gun. He got to the wall and settled himself beside an aperture, in line with the whole wall full of reclining riflemen. He peered out between his merlons and found himself looking into the westering sun.

Saturnino had flung his forces on top of the houses directly west of the *palacio*. This screened his men in the yellow glow of the declining sun. The whole outline of the opposite buildings was an indistinct purple.

The drummer stared fixedly at this purple outline; then he thought he glimpsed a movement. He leveled his gun and fired. At the same moment a machine gun near him began a sudden chattering. Just where the drummer had seen a movement the black figure of a man lurched up against the yellow light and disappeared backward.

A thrill of triumph shot through Strawbridge. He thought he had hit his man. He lifted himself for a good look and another shot, when a bullet flicked a bit of stone out of his merlon and cut his forehead just over his eye.

The salesman dodged down, put up his fingers to the sting and saw that he was bleeding a little. It made him angry, and he fired his rifle viciously several times at the blank purple rim of the opposite wall.

At the moment a warm hand was laid on his shoulder. Strawbridge looked around and saw that it was General Fombombo. The dictator was patting his shoulder warmly and encouraging him as a father might encourage the first efforts of a son.

"That's the idea; two or three quick shots, then get down."

The general himself did not keep down so carefully. He seemed entirely sure that he would not be touched and was careful only of his men.

A contagious power surrounded the commander. His hand on Strawbridge's shoulder filled the American with a queer warmth and confidence. He felt a passion to do some striking thing in the general's service. He stood up quite as high as the dictator himself and suddenly cried out:

"Look! Yonder are some fellows down on the street level! Watch me get——"

The general pressed him down.

"Guard yourself," he ordered. "You are too valuable to be in this firing-line. You've got to go to New York for me. You report to the magazine and help send up ammunition. All right, quick! Crawl down now!"

The drummer stayed down without question and was about to crawl off toward the manhole when abruptly the whole rank of rapid-fire guns began a steady shrieking. At the same moment half the riflemen reared up to shoot at something on the street level. As they did so there came a cracking from the opposite building.

The guards fell backward from their barricade, some wounded, some finished. Perhaps a half remained standing, firing solid volleys down into the street.

Fombombo bellowed for the riflemen to remain down and let the machine guns clean the streets. The big man's roars seemed to fling the soldiers back into their niches. The machine gunners, with their steel shields protecting them, depressed their guns and began a vibratory screaming at something below.

Strawbridge peered through a machicolation with a nervous spasm in his throat. Out from behind the nearest building came a swarm of ghastly, scarlet figures armed with heavy timbers. The machine guns whipped the *calle* about them. Groups of the ragged red specters were struck to the ground about the timbers, but others of the rabble of reds leaped to their places.

They were the reds. Saturnino had collected these wretches from the canal camps all over the survey and now flung them at the dictator. There was something sickening in the charge of the reds across the *calle*. The machine guns could not beat them back. They came on, sowing the street with filthy red canvas bags; but they came on and rushed their timbers under the overhang of the building where the guns could not reach them.

The drummer turned and scuttled toward the manhole. As he straightened and went flying down the steps he heard a great booming echoing through the *palacio*.

It was the reds thundering with their wooden rams against the doors of the State house. When Strawbridge got below, the whole *palacio* shook with the blows. All the inner doors along the central hallway stood open, and soldiers darted in and out of the rooms to fire through the windows. Rifle shots roared through the place, and the stinking haze of smokeless powder floated out into the corridor through the tops of the doors and settled up against the roof.

SOME impulse sent Strawbridge running to the *señora's* room. As he dodged inside he saw two groups of soldiers crouched in the corners and raking the windows with their fire. Some of their steel-jacketed bullets bit pieces out of the iron window-bars. At regular intervals the end of a heavy beam of timber crashed against the bars and slowly bent the heavy grill inward. One by one the anchorages in the stone casing broke loose.

The two squads of peon soldiers were barricaded behind delicate dressing-tables, exquisitely wrought chairs; half a dozen guards knelt behind a great canopied four-poster. Their rifles were leveled across an embroidered silk coverlet. Everything in the room still looked incongruously feminine, even with men firing across it and a dead soldier sprawled on a settee.

Now and then a bullet drilled a neat hole in a delicate, old-fashioned thin glass mirror in a dressing-stand. And notwithstanding the sharp stench of powder gas, still a faint feminine sweetness lingered in the *señora's* apartment, a gentle wraith that would not be exorcised.

Abruptly the whole of the bending bars broke loose and clanged down inside. Instantly the window was filled with crashing rifles. The concussion tore the drummer's ear-drums as he crouched behind the massive bed. Guards crumpled up out of both firing-squads. Bottles, brushes, silver containers on the *señora's* dressing-table leaped to splinters.

The next moment the window was full of the heads and shoulders of men struggling to climb inside. They were the most ghastly human beings the drummer had ever imagined.

The few guards left in the room fired pointblank into these terrible creatures. Strawbridge caught up a gun and was on the point of firing. He was aiming down his barrel at a skull-like head when he recognized the tortured features and the burning monkey eyes of Josefa.

Such a revulsion swept over the American at the semblance of the little clerk that he dropped his rifle and crouched behind the silken bed, staring. The prisoners in La Fortuna had been released. The mere horror of their faces must have shocked the remnant of the guard into flight. Those who were unwounded leaped from hiding and bolted for the door, shouting above the din:

"*Los presos!*" The prisoners are upon us! La Fortuna has fallen!"

They rushed pellmell into the hallway, still shouting their warning until their voices were lost in the din.

The drummer crouched staring at these animated cadavers. Whether the prisoners recognized and spared an American or whether they overlooked him among the wounded and dead, the drummer never knew.

The disinterred wretches streamed past, with unshaven faces, with yellow skins sticking to the very bones of their skulls, with eyes lost in bony pits, with lips stretched across teeth in wrinkles. Their clothes were torn, exposing filth and sores.

Into the boudoir with them gushed the smell of rotting flesh and latrines. It overrode the odor of powder and feminine perfume. This was the very dung of Venezuelan society; it was the cesspool of the prison regurgitating into the palace again; it was human sewage flowing backward. It was inexpressibly obscene.

A terrible nausea overcame Strawbridge; yet as they passed into the hallway he struggled up and followed them. The corridor was a haze filled with flashing rifles.

Out of half a dozen rooms poured other assailants who had succeeded in breaking through the windows; other prisoners, other reds, other insurgent soldiers all mixed in the maddest confusion. They collected themselves under some leader, they formed themselves into a monstrous regiment and then went pouring through the doorway on to the staircase that led to the roof.

The drummer stood watching the scarecrow fighters as if hypnotized. He watched them swirl into the passage that led above.

Suddenly above the tumult he heard the hard, shuddering reports of the machine guns. A storm of steel burst down on the ghastly assailants, bearing them backward; but the skeleton regiment recoiled, bent low and started climbing again, struggling up over their fallen comrades straight into the muzzles of the guns.

Ghastly, croaking shouts; thin, rattling huzzas; the clatter of the guns; the reek of ordure and sores; the inferno roared on. The rattle of the machine guns was dwindling. Strawbridge heard hoarse coughing cries:

"Down with Fombombo! There he is! Strike him! Stab! Shoot! Here he is; over with him!"

The drummer wondered what thoughts burned through the dictator's mind as he faced his horrible enemies. The cesspool of the prison had belched back clear up to the roof of the *palacio*, and General Fombombo was inundated.

* * *

STRAWBRIDGE was deathly sick. He tottered back to the boudoir and clambered out of the broken window unopposed. Assailants no longer encircled the *palacio;* they had drained inside. The tumult on the roof was rapidly subsiding. Here and there cries of "*Viva* Saturnino!" began to sound. Presently a few soldiers came running out of the *palacio* waving their rifles and shouting—

"*Viva* Saturnino!"

Viva Saturnino! The battle was over.

News of the victory spread through the plaza and the adjoining streets with extraordinary swiftness. Strawbridge could hear cries for Saturnino as they were repeated in every direction; near, far, now from all parts at once—

"*Viva* Saturnino!"

By common concert men and women appeared coming in from every direction. Crowds might have formed out of the air. They came shouting and huzzaing for victory. They took up the cry:

"Liberty! Justice and Saturnino!"

A group of peons began dancing in the evening shadows which fell across the plaza. Some tatterdemalions ran with ropes, lassoed the head of General Fombombo's statue and began pulling it from its pedestal. The marble seemed to resist. It held out its scroll bearing "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," but at last it swung slowly outward and smashed down on the pavement.

At its fall a ferocious joy-making boiled up in the crowd. Some one lighted a fire in the center of the square and immediately every one flung the litter from the refugees on to the pyre; broken carts, smashed furniture, rags, all manner of waste.

The fire boiled up in a great white smoke, and presently flames began licking through it. The revelers began to sing; half a dozen voices, a score, others and others until a great sounding chorus roared up from the plaza. Some rhymster had improvised the words.

Viva el Coronel Saturnino,
Son of Freedom and Rio Negro.
Safe our daughters and our *niñas*,
To —— with General Fombombo.

The crowd danced about the bonfire to this absurd chant; men and women, embracing, kissing, singing, whirling in and out like brown vortices of sand blown up by the winds on the llanos.

The drummer stood near the façade of the *palacio* watching this growing saturnalia. He thought of the *señora*, and he thanked God she was safe in some convent out of all this fury and madness.

Greater and greater crowds gathered into the plaza; they streamed in from everywhere.

An old woman passed Strawbridge with her arms about a filthy, skeleton-like creature. In the gathering gloom of evening Strawbridge recognized the old charwoman of the cathedral, Doña Consolacion, and her grandson Josefa. These two had been reunited.

The drummer watched them pass. The strange thought came to him that he had brought them down to their poor plight.

The bonfire was leaping high by this time, and the ornamental trees stood out against the flames with the delicacy of an etching. Below circled the dark figures of the peons singing of liberty, justice and Saturnino.

Amid the rhythmic intervals of this uproar the American heard a solitary sobbing. The sound was so consonant to his own mood that he looked about for the mourner.

He found the weeper in the gloom beside the long stairway that led up into the *palacio.* He walked slowly around the curve of the marble balustrade; and in the shadows he saw a fat, misshapen woman bending over some object on the pavement and weeping vehemently.

Strawbridge drew closer until he could see her face, distorted with grief. It was Madruja. The peon girl was heavy with an unborn child, and in her arms she held the still body of the fallen dictator. The dead tyrant looked curiously small as he lay on the pavement where he had been thrown from the roof of the *palacio.* Occasionally the girl would pause in her sobbing to stroke the dead man's face with her puffed fingers; then she would break out afresh.

XXVII

THE dead man's fate depressed Strawbridge, and the irony of all this rejoicing at the rise of Saturnino filled him with bitterness. He turned away. He meant to go back to the priests' house. He would get away from this anarchic land as quickly as he could.

As he turned, a girl came running down the steps of the *palacio.* She stopped some half-way down and peered at the man on the pavement. Next moment she called his name under her breath.

"*Ola,* Señor Strawbridge, is that you?" She darted quickly down the rest of the steps to him.

"*Ca!* Señor Strawbridge, come to my *señora* at once; she needs you! Quick! *Pronto! Ehue, señor,* hurry!"

The drummer recognized the griffe girl. The urgency in her voice brought him up sharply.

"What is it, Chica?"

"*Oh, Madre de Jesus!* The soldiers are searching the convents! She has slipped into the garden and hid! The poor angel! I went flying for you! *Señor,* hurry! For love of the Virgin! Would you have a heretic like Saturnino seize a nun!"

A terrible feeling came over Strawbridge.

"Seize her! Is that —— hound——"

The monstrousness of it throttled him. The griffe girl pulled at his sleeve, and by this time both were running diagonally across the plaza. This was not conspicuous. They might have been new merrymakers hurrying to sing around the bonfire of the rise of Saturnino and of his protection to "our daughters and our *niñas.*"

But these two angled into one of the narrow *calles* that emptied into the plaza. Even from this little run the convalescent began to breathe heavily. He caught his breath to ask—

"When did you leave her?"

"Just a moment ago."

"How do you know they are searching the convents?"

"I was in the convent of Saint Ursula with her."

"What did they do there?"

"The soldiers surrounded the place and allowed no one to leave."

"That might be to keep you from getting hurt," gasped the drummer with a ray of hope.

"Oh, no; they are searching other convents. One of the sisters escaped and told us. Everybody knows who Coronel Saturnino is hunting."

The drummer mended his lagging trot a trifle.

"——!" he breathed in despair; then—

"Aren't we almost there?"

The girl pointed ahead at the upper story of a big convent that rose above the poor huts which surrounded it. It was hazy in the gathering shadows of night.

"She is hiding in the garden on this side."

"Were you in there with her?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

"How'd you get out?"

"I climbed the limb of a tree and dropped out."

The drummer was filled with apprehension.

"Good Lord, we'll never get back in that way!"

The griffe girl suddenly began to whimper.

"Oh, *señor,* don't say that! It is the only way we can get back! We can't let the poor *señora* be caught in the garden!"

At this moment the two rounded a corner and came upon the high, dark wall of a Venezuelan garden. It was quite as high as an ordinary adobe house and was finished in the same way, with plastered masonry. It had not a foothold from top to bottom.

The girl caught the American's arm and drew him to a standstill.

"*Ola!*" she breathed. "There they are now!"

The drummer paused to peer through the gloom and saw two peons with rifles, standing half-way down the length of the garden.

The drummer looked at them, ransacking his brain for some plan. He hit on something and moved forward again with his shoulders back and with a certain air of authority. The girl nipped his arm and whispered:

"*Caramba!* I tell you there they are!"

The big American gave the girl a backward push with his hand and swore in a whisper:

"—— it, I know they are there. Think I'm blind?"

The maid stopped beneath the shadow of a Bougainvillea that overleaned the high wall. Strawbridge marched briskly down toward the soldiers. They heard him approach, clicked their rifles and called him to halt.

The big man stepped out of the shadow of the wall into the dull light where they could see him more plainly.

"I am the *Americano* who is backing Coronel Saturnino's rebellion with his money," he stated briefly. "I suppose you saw me give him a chest of gold in San Geronimo—at least you heard about it."

One of the guards saluted.

"*Sí, señor.*"

"The *coronel* has reached Saint Ursula now; he told me to come out here and send in you two guards to help him search the place."

One of the soldiers looked at him.

"How came the *coronel* to send you, *señor?*"

"Me—why, I'm no Catholic. I'm a Protestant. You don't imagine the *coronel* would allow a Protestant to go searching through a Catholic convent, do you? He respects the decencies of life."

The doubting guard touched his cap.

"Very well, sir."

Both of them turned about, shouldered their rifles and marched off down the garden fence toward the convent.

When they were some distance away Strawbridge turned and beckoned. The griffe girl came to him noiselessly. She was doubled up with stifled explosions of laughter.

"*Caramba,* what a man!" she gasped. "Send those two donkeys trotting off like that! *Ca!*"

She put her hand on her stomach and doubled again.

Strawbridge shook her out of her mirth.

"Here, cut it out! How can we get into this garden?"

He looked up the sheer wall.

"How in the —— are we ever going to get in?"

The griffe girl looked up, perfectly sober.

"I got out on that tree."

She pointed at an overhanging bough.

"Well —— it, you see you can't reach it now. You couldn't reach that from the top of the wall!"

"No, *señor.*"

The drummer took the girl by the arm as if he meant to throw her over and moved distractedly back along the wall.

"I wonder if you could hold on to that Bougainvillea?" he speculated hurriedly. "The only thing I see to do is to boost you up to it. We can try it."

They hurried up under the bush. Strawbridge picked her up bodily with his good hand and the elbow of his bad arm. He got her to his shoulder and shoved upward with his whole strength.

The smell of the kitchen enveloped him. Sweat trickled out of his face. The girl herself might have been made of rubber from the resiliency of her flesh. Her sandaled feet were on his shoulders; then she stepped on his head. Flickers of flame danced before his eyes as she kicked off and grabbed the downhanging bush above them. The next moment she was scrambling toward the top of the wall clinging to an armful of Bougainvillea stems.

Strawbridge watched her with his arms still straining upward, as if he still bore her weight. He stood thus, tense and staring, as the half-breed girl gained slowly upward, made a last convulsive kick and wriggled her body over the top of the wall. Then he put down his arms with an exhausted breath and found that his sore hand was aching.

THE drummer stood for a monotonous age in the gloom beside the garden waiting for the reappearance of the maid and her mistress. He peered down the *calle* in the direction the two soldiers had taken, expecting every moment to see them come running back. Then he would stare up at the top of the wall, listening and watching for some movement.

As he stood there the stars came out among the overhanging branches. A faint perfume of some flowering tree sifted down to him, and its fragrance alternated among the slow air currents with the smells of a Latin street.

A rumor of the turmoil in the plaza still reached his ears, but it was overpowered at regular intervals by the sharp trilling of some insect in the wall. This tiny creature repeated its love trill over and over until at last it caught the drummer's attention. He made a slight attempt to locate it. He thought what a strange thing it was for this little living speck to send out its love-cry over and over and to expect, out of the immensity of the night, some final answer. And there was he, Thomas Strawbridge, on precisely the same quest of love as the midge in the wall.

It was a fantastic thought. The drummer shuddered and moved about. It seemed to him the insect had been trilling for hours. He thought surely the women inside the garden must somehow strangely have gone to sleep.

He reached down and groped for a pebble. He was about to toss it over into the garden when he heard a movement on the top of the wall. Then the voice of the griffe girl whispered:

"*Señor*, we went to the gate. There are four guards at the gate. How will the *señora* ever get down?"

Strawbridge was at the edge of his nerves. He thought in irritation—

"You —— fools, wasting time to go to the gate!"

He said aloud:

"Dolores! Are you up there, Dolores?"

"Oh, Tomas, how can I get down?" came the girl's whisper.

"You'll have to drop!"

"But I can't!"

"You'll have to."

He braced himself for a violent strain.

"I'll catch you!"

"I—I——"

The salesman heard a movement above, then the rapid breathing of women attempting some uncertain feat. Presently he made out an object lowering itself, or being lowered, from the rim of the wall. Then he heard a strained whisper:

"Oh, *señor*, I *can't* let go! Please come up and help me!"

Strawbridge was writhing in a rigor of impatience.

"Drop! For ——'s sake, drop, Dolores!"

"But I can't drop in the dark! I can't— Do please climb up to me!"

"Dolores, beautiful, I can't climb a flat wall! What would I do up there? Listen! Oh, listen! Yonder they come! For ——'s sake, Dolores, drop. Chica! Chica! Break her grip! Shove her hands loose! Quick! —— it, here they come!"

At that instant there came a flurry of falling skirts; a blow of soft flesh staggered the drummer and almost brought him to his knees. An aura of faint perfume surrounded him. The breath burst from the girl's strained lungs as she jarred through her lover's arms to the ground. The next moment they had straightened themselves and set out running hand in hand down the *calle*.

"To the cathedral!" gasped the *señora*. "We'll be safe there!"

From behind them came shouts, then a rifle shot. A moment later the fugitives ran past the turn in the *calle* and for the moment were screened from rifle fire.

They had hardly turned when the griffe girl came pattering behind them. She was winged with terror for her mistress.

"Oh, Heart of Pity! They are firing! Run! Run!"

The maid's excitement really hurried them on faster than the shots had done; but the *señora* already was panting with the exhaustion of the gently bred.

"I—I— How far do we have to run?" she gasped.

"On, on, *señora!* Merciful Mary!"

"But—but I can't! I—I——"

"L—Let's carry her!" panted Strawbridge, at the end of his resources; but he knew he could not do it.

The run was telling on his own strength.

They were half-way down the *calle* now, spurring on the last of the *señora's* endurance. They were running between solidly built walls. Behind them the soldiers began shouting commands to halt. The Spanish girl began blubbering—

"I—I'll have to stop; I—can't—go—any——"

At that moment Strawbridge glimpsed a little gap in the wall of houses—the slit-like mouth of a tiny *calle*. He gasped to the *señora:*

"Dart into that! Here, to the left! Jump in as we pass. Get to the cathedral the best you can! Chica and I will run on!"

The Spanish girl used up the last of her strength to forge ahead of the two who ran close to the wall behind her, screening her movements in the gloom. The next moment she disappeared in the narrow opening.

Strawbridge watched her go with a queer sensation. Now he and the griffe girl ran on alone. When the whole party, pursued and pursuers, were well past the hiding-place of the Spanish woman the griffe girl whispered in a fairly controlled breath—

"Let's run off and leave them, *señor!*"

"Can you?" puffed the drummer, surprized.

"*Seguramente, señor!*"

There was even a hint of the light-hearted in her voice.

By this time Strawbridge had driven his heart action up to running tempo. He was now good for twenty or thirty minutes of hard running. He answered the griffe girl by increasing his pace.

She kept even with him, apparently without exertion. Even in the midst of his anxiety about the *señora* the drummer sensed the freedom and resilience of the girl's movements. When they were momentarily screened by another turn in the *calle* the girl flung out, "Now let's leave them!" and she darted forward at an extraordinary sprint.

Nothing but pride drove Strawbridge to keep even with her. He spurted at top speed. His long legs spanned the cobblestones at a furious clip. The griffe girl twinkled along at his side with the effortlessness of a squirrel. She must have enjoyed running; she made little sounds of pleasure.

When the soldiers rounded the corner and saw their quarry far down the *calle* there came a hurricane of distant oaths and shouts, then the sharp cracking of high-powered rifles and a whistling about their ears.

The griffe girl had the breath to giggle hysterically—

"They—can't—run—or—shoot——"

But the next moment she gave a little cry. With an extra spurt of speed she veered to Strawbridge, clutched his hand, tried to pull him along; then she pressed it sharply against her bosom and blubbered:

"*Adios, mi amo*— They— My mistress——"

Then abruptly and shockingly she fell headlong on the cobbles out of a dead run. Like some wild animal the griffe girl had dashed twenty or thirty yards carrying a shot through her heart.

STRAWBRIDGE stooped for a moment over the body of the griffe girl and with a stab of pain realized that she was dead. He lifted her head and shoulders with an idea of carrying her body to some decent place, but another fusillade of shots rattled behind him.

He dropped her on the cobblestones and dashed ahead, bending low to avoid the bullets as much as he might. He had not run twenty yards when he came out on the open plaza. If the griffe girl could have gone twenty yards farther——

He turned sharply to the right along the shop-fronts and tried to lose himself as quickly as possible among the bacchanalian crowd. He began threading his way as quickly as he could toward the cathedral.

The murder of the servant girl filled him with terrible apprehensions for the *señora*. She was alone in this half-mad city. He began reproaching himself with ever having left her. A hundred misfortunes could befall an unaccompanied woman on Spanish-American streets after nightfall. Some of her pursuers could easily have followed the girl up the narrow *calle*. They might be carrying her back to Saturnino at this moment— A chill sweat broke out on Strawbridge's face. He shoved along through the dancing crowd past the bonfire toward the church. The leaping flames of the fire cast waves of illumination across the plaza and against the cathedral, causing its massive façade to glow and fade in the darkness.

From the moment Strawbridge could make out the three dark archways of the triple entrance he began looking for the woman. He hurried along, peering ahead, hitting his fist against his palm, twisting his fingers. His rapid walk changed into a trot. He forgot that his great height rendered him conspicuous as he shoved along through those low-statured Venezuelans.

Once he looked back, and he saw a sinister thing. A squad of soldiers were plunging through the singers of liberty like a plow. They left a furrow in the human mass behind them which required twenty or thirty seconds to refill with revelers. Then from another direction a second body of soldiers pushed their way; these two bodies were converging on the cathedral.

The sight of these squads whipped the drummer into headlong flight again. He ramped forward, a great, tall, big-bodied man, colliding and stumbling over the shorter folk. Women shrieked out of his path, terrified by a running giant bearing down upon them. He must have been a startling apparition.

The drummer kept flinging back glances, momentarily expecting the soldiers to raise their rifles and fire. His apprehension increased the closer he came to the cathedral. His back crawled with dread of a crashing impact.

One little fact comforted his harassed brain: If the two squads were focusing on the cathedral, Dolores must have escaped. If he were killed Father Benicio would protect her.

At the very moment he thought of the priest he saw him. The cleric's black-robed figure stood at the entrance of the middle door as if on guard. When Strawbridge reached the piazza in front of the church he slackened his pace to something a little more respectful.

"Father—father," he panted when he was close enough, "is Dolores in the church? Has she come? For ——'s sake, man, tell me!"

The priest waved him sharply inside, then walked quickly to the smallest of the three portals, apparently to shut it. He seemed to have been waiting for the American's arrival. What he did next the American did not know; he was already hurrying down the aisle toward the chapel of the Last Supper.

Strawbridge knew that Dolores was in this chapel. The man's heart drummed in his chest. He turned into the entrance. He could see nothing except the slender, dark figure against a glow of gold. The girl turned at his footstep, gave a little cry and lifted herself to the arms of her lover.

The big American bent over her, unable to see for his own tears. He kissed her ears, her chin, with her nun's bonnet in his face. He lifted a clumsy hand to remove it. His shaking fingers felt the coils of her hair, the curve of her neck. The bonnet was tied on. He forsook the task. He was half-sobbing:

"Oh, I ought never to have left you! Poor angel, did they hurt you!"

She got the bonnet off with fluttering fingers, and it fell down before the altar. They stood pressing their mouths together, clinging to each other. They had been so terrified for each other, and now their nerves swung back in a crescent and inarticulate transport.

Strawbridge began speaking first.

"I saw some soldiers coming this way. I think we'd better go."

The girl lifted her face from his breast to look at him.

"Leave the cathedral!"

"Why yes, beautiful; I tell you the soldiers chased me in here. They must be outside. God knows how long we've been standing here!"

She loosed herself and straightened.

"But, my own heaven, this is our sanctuary. We are safe here."

It had never occurred to the drummer to allow the cathedral to be the haven of his flight.

"But listen, beloved; we're not safe anywhere. You thought you were safe in the convent, but——"

"But *mi adoracion*, you know that not even *he* would violate the chapel of our Merciful Lady."

She looked at him, amazed.

"But he will! I know he will. Here, let's go!"

He took her arm and swung her gently about so that she was at his side with one of his arms about her waist.

"But, *mi carino!*" she cried. "Don't you know if he should dare come in here our Holy Lady would cast him out of this cathedral! *Ca!* She would call down fire from heaven upon his head!"

The girl made a sharp gesture from the image on the altar to some imaginary victim before it.

Such a passion of belief startled the drummer. He had never before sensed this fire in the girl. But his own apprehension was rising constantly.

He heard a murmur arising at the front of the cathedral. He made her listen; he began urging her more strongly than ever that they fly while they could. She put a hand over his mouth.

"But listen, *carissimo*," she insisted passionately, "our Loving Lady brought us together in her chapel. Shall we not trust Her to the end? Can we wound Her feelings by deserting Her now?"

She touched her breast and forehead and looked at the image.

"Oh, *mi corazon*, I prayed and prayed to Her for this great happiness. I wrote a letter to my Dear Lady and placed it here on Her altar so my prayer would go up to her like an incense. And now I have you!"

She put her arms around him again and gazed into his face with rapt and tender eyes.

"Let us stay here!"

The fact that Dolores had written the letter which he had contemplated writing moved Strawbridge with a profound intimacy and sweetness. It gave him another of his rare glimpses of the eternity in which his little life momentarily moved. Perhaps supernal powers were indeed ranged back of these altars with their protecting arms about him and this sweet lady.

The thought of such guardianship wrapped the drummer in its glory. It picked up his passion for the Spanish girl; it lifted it from the earth and set it up in heaven, like a star.

He was almost minded to rest his fate with the Virgin; but his mystical mood was broken by the gathering turmoil at the cathedral's entrance. The sounds reached the chapel softened and sweetened by arches and domes, but they were sinister. They whipped the American's thoughts from any supernatural help and set him back sharply on his pagan self-reliance. He took the girl's arm again.

"Look here, Dolores," he hurried as the sounds swelled in intensity, "we'll have to go. She—" he nodded at the altar—"She's done enough. All I want. She's got us together. Now we ought to help ourselves!"

Strawbridge's voice admitted of no discussion. He was almost dragging the girl away.

"But—where are we going?" she sobbed.

"I don't know. We'll have to try our luck somewhere— Listen to that—Hurry!"

The noise at the entrance was resounding as if the cathedral were a bass viol. Dolores moved instinctively back to her Protectress, but Strawbridge hurried her along. No doubt to the Spanish girl they were going out into chaos.

As Strawbridge half-ran up the aisle he thought swiftly of possible avenues of escape. He remembered the underground tunnels in the crypt, but thought of flying through a hole in the ground was repellent to him. He would take the night and the stars.

Even while he was planning he hurried to the side door of the cathedral which let out into the garden. As he fumbled at the bolts with his good hand there came two heavy, drum-like reports from the front of the cathedral. This seemed to loose pandemonium in the church.

* * *

THE drummer leaped with the girl into the dark garden and went running down the hedge. They were not a hundred feet before they heard men rush out of the side door behind them.

Bending low in the shadow, Strawbridge ran at full tilt. His good arm took the strain of the *señora's* stumblings. In his necessity he upheld her, he almost carried her. He crashed on through the garden. His impact burst open the little postern gate toward the *palacio*.

As he bolted through, the hard clapping of rifles behind him filled him with a furious anger. He expected momentarily to feel the *señora* lunge forward as the griffe girl had done. As he ran he cursed his pursuers in silence with every blasphemy he could lay thought to. He could hear the Spanish girl whispering rapid prayers.

He rushed across to the piazza behind the *palacio*. He swung Dolores upon it and leaped up after her. The west side of the piazza was blocked by the palace kitchen. In the cooking-stove a handful of red coals glowered at him. Their pursuers had now filled the thoroughfare between the garden and the *palacio* and seemed to be firing at random.

Suddenly he saw two or three forms leap up on the platform. The drummer ran to the river side of the piazza. The girl clutched his arm.

"Oh, *carissimo*—we are not going down there!"

"——, yes, there's nowhere else to go!"

They stepped on to the steep, dark slope that dropped away to the river. Instantly they were sliding and slipping down, helter-skelter. They went through rotting flesh, bones, decaying vegetables, stenches and smells such as are found nowhere on earth save outside a Latin-American kitchen. They balanced, they caught each other, they fell on their hands and knees. The fetor of the stuff high on the bank changed to the dull smell of dried leavings farther down.

Suddenly from far above them came the flashes of rifles. As usual with riflemen on a height, the soldiers overshot. A moment later the fugitives reached the dank smell that marked the river's edge.

Not forty yards down the river Strawbridge saw the glimmer of a white object. The drummer went running toward it, lifting the girl on his arm. The scoured canoe took form out of the night.

The drummer swung Dolores bodily over the garboard, then heaved at the prow and began backing the canoe out into the dark, swift river. When it was well afloat he leaped and landed on his belly across its nose. He wriggled inside, groped for the paddle, straightened up and began working furiously with his good hand and his elbow away from the rifle fire.

When he was well away he looked back. Flashes from the rifles were still visible, but they seemed to be moving rapidly up the river-bank. With them drifted the black bulk of the *palacio*, the stately spire of the cathedral, the somber outline of La Fortuna. All moved evenly and swiftly into the west; they dwindled in size and definition until presently they melted into the night. At last all the fugitives could discern were the red reflections of the bonfire against the clouds.

Around the canoe boiled the rapids of the Rio Negro. They were in the midst of the thunder that brooded for miles over cities and villages and llanos. The air was full of flying spray and the peculiar smell of fresh water in great disturbance.

The canoe was flung skyward, dropped. It came to sharp pauses, leaped forward and pirouetted on prow and stern.

Strawbridge lay flat on his back in the fishboat to keep the center of gravity as low as possible. The stars overhead appeared to him a whirling vortex of fiery points.

He gripped the Spanish girl's hands in his good palm. He could feel her moving her rosary through her fingers. As they shot through the black thunder the Spanish girl was praying to the Virgin of Canalejos. Dolores believed that the Virgin was guiding the canoe down the perilous channel.

Strawbridge's nerves were at tension, but he was not afraid. He believed in his luck.

XXVIII

THE distance from Canalejos to San Geronimo is much greater following the meanders of the Rio Negro than the direct route across the llanos. When dawn whitened over the river on the morning after the flight of the drummer and the Spanish girl, Strawbridge expected hourly to see the campaniles of San Geronimo appear above the horizon. It was his plan when he came in sight of the city to wait until night before he attempted to pass in the canoe. He reasoned that Saturnino would telegraph to San Geronimo and order their arrest and imprisonment.

So as the two fugitives floated down the great, muddy flood they peered through the beating sunshine and the dancing glare from the water in order to see and be warned by the first glimpse of the distant city. But such a fulgor lay over the water that toward the middle of the morning they were hardly able to see the reeds that marched down to the riverside, or the green parrots that passed over the canoe in great flocks and filled the sky with a harsh screaming.

The river stretched on mile after mile, a vast, moving plane that banished the shores to level lines almost at the horizon. At last Strawbridge came to paddle close to one shore in order that their tiny canoe might not be utterly lost amid such an immensity.

As they clung closely to the left or easterly bank they passed in the afternoon what appeared to be the mouth of a small tributary river. Along its banks was a scattering of deserted huts, stakes with rusting chains to them, a stockade of reeds daubed with mud, two or three adobe ovens such as the peons use.

Strawbridge looked at the abandoned site curiously, and presently he realized that he was passing one of the branches that would have formed a part of General Fombombo's great system of canals. The work lay abandoned in a furnace of heat; the conscripted reds were gone. The only life visible were the crocodiles which had taken possession of the waterway and sunned themselves along its sandy rim.

As the man and the woman floated past they looked at the intake and the empty camp until it grew small in the distance and at last melted into the dancing horizon.

What the Spanish girl thought as she looked at this ruinous fragment of her husband's great dream Strawbridge did not know, nor did he dare to ask.

This long reach of water wrought by the fettered reds somehow made Strawbridge as he floated past it in his little canoe feel small and uncertain of himself. It brought to his mind keenly the general, his restless planning, working, gathering gold, attacking cities, conscripting labor for vast projects; and now he was gone and this mighty fragment of his work was a harbor for reptiles.

Seen from this perspective, the fact that the dictator had abandoned Dolores who did not love him for peon girls who did, no longer appeared the high crime which the American had held most harshly against him. It occurred to Strawbridge that there must have been sides to the general which he had missed, or but dimly apprehended.

The drummer's thoughts swung away from the general to the long line of dictators who had arisen and oppressed Rio Negro. Each tyrant no sooner gained power than immediately he fell into some madness peculiar to himself.

Strawbridge wondered why they did. Heretofore he had thought that such tyranny and oppression arose out of sheer wickedness; but now, looking back on the life of the general, he doubted this judgment.

The trend of Fombombo's plans had always been toward some great good for his State. But his efforts, it seemed to Strawbridge, were unbusinesslike. He made a gesture toward projects far beyond his resources.

This effort to outstrip his physical resources forced him to conscript the reds. It was his sensitiveness to any criticism of his unbusinesslike policy that caused him to imprison every critic of his methods. Lack of business acumen was the basic weakness which led to the dictator's tyrannies and to his final downfall.

As Strawbridge sat in the canoe brooding over it, a strange thought came to him that perhaps all righteousness of conduct was at last resolvable to dollars and cents.

He mused over this curious theory. Gumersindo had told him some of the history of Spain, and all the time the negro editor was relating the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Peninsula the drummer kept thinking not of any abstract injustice of the banishment, but of the extraordinarily bad business methods the Spanish monarch used. Likewise he could not resist thinking that while the Spanish Inquisition struck a fine attitude before Heaven, it cut a very poor figure on Exchange.

And now Strawbridge thought that just as Spain had suffered from lack of business, Venezuela, her colony, had inherited the same curse. The Venezuelans placed religion before business; they placed family pride before business; they placed pleasure before business. It seemed to Strawbridge that they placed the smallest before the greatest.

Heretofore when Strawbridge's Venezuelan friends had twitted the American with possessing "monetary morals" the drummer was wounded and inclined to take offense at the qualification. Now as he thought about it more steadily it dawned on him that the ability to sift conduct down to its money value was about the only universal standard of righteousness the world would ever know.

Religion can never enunciate morals because the religion of every man is peculiar to himself, and any standard of conduct drawn from it is necessarily idiosyncratic. On the other hand morals drawn from pure ethics will vary with the geographical location and the physical and financial condition of the casuist.

Metaphysics starts from nowhere and reaches nothing. But money has a clean-cut value to every man in every nation. When the final test of moral action is, "Does it pay?" anybody can determine what is right. There can never be a war over a difference of opinion about the multiplication table, or any serious dispute as to whether two and two make four. The International Peace Conference was essentially an economic approach toward the wounds of the world.

It seemed to Strawbridge that the application of economics to moral action would one day prove as rehabilitating as the application of higher mathematics to astrology, or the microscope to biology. It would furnish an exact basis of measurement upon which all men and all nations could agree.

This curious conclusion settled many interrogations in the drummer's mind and brought to him a kind of peace. Strawbridge felt a man's impulse to share his thoughts with the *señora.*

He glanced up at her with his theory on the tip of his tongue, but she seemed absorbed in her own musings. As he looked at her through the glare of sunshine, his instinct warned him that he would better not attempt it. It was very precious to him, but it would not be very precious to her. Indeed as he looked at her he began to realize that she would never understand it; that she was born on the wrong side of the world ever to understand just these thoughts.

She looked very dear and lovable.

THE fugitives did not reach San Geronimo until the third night following their flight. They approached the city in the darkness as they had planned, but to their surprize and dismay they saw hundreds of lights moving over the face of the water. From afar off these lights looked like a field of fireflies, but presently they developed into native torches such as the Orinoco Indians use in hunting alligators at night.

The man and the woman were terrified and talked in whispers what course they could pursue. Dolores suggested that they go ashore on the other side of the river and walk down past the town.

This was impossible because the city lay in the junction of the Rio Negro and the Orinoco. They would be caught in this V-shaped mesopotamia with nowhere to walk except back up the Orinoco.

Moreover any walking at all in such a pestilential country would mean a painful and protracted death for Dolores. Nor was the drummer in any degree a woodsman. He always lost his direction in the open.

It seemed to Strawbridge that their only possible hope was to reach one of the searching canoes and bribe the owner into running them through the blockade. He knew a report of his imaginary wealth had been spread among the peons, and now he hoped by wide promises to slip through the *coronel's* fleet.

He veered his canoe in the darkness and began paddling slowly toward one of the lights. It seemed an ironic thing to the drummer that freedom, the right to a home and to Dolores should lie just a quarter of a mile beyond those patrolling torches. To accomplish this, he had scarcely a gambler's chance.

Saturnino, sitting in his study in San Geronimo, had worked out every possible combination which Strawbridge could attempt. Now this diapering of lights moving against the darkness was one of his checks.

In the midst of his thoughts Strawbridge became aware that half a dozen or more lights were bearing down on his canoe. The drummer stopped paddling in dismay. He had thought to paddle silently up to one of the canoes unseen by the others and quietly make his compact with the canoeist to assist him through the blockade. Now with dozens of boats bearing down on him from every direction bribery was impossible.

He sat staring at the gathering torches with a profound sinking of the heart. By no possibility could he, a one-handed man, race away from the Indians.

The Spanish girl moved to him.

"Oh, dear Tomas," she whispered, "are we going to be lost after all?"

The girl's helplessness moved the drummer.

"I suppose talking to him, pleading with him, begging him for the love of humanity to let you go——"

The girl gave his hand a pressure.

"No, we must not despair. I know the sweet Virgin will save us. She would not do so much and then let us be lost."

The girl lifted her white face toward the stars and began murmuring her prayers.

The drummer looked at her with a profound pity and tenderness. He knew it would indeed require a miracle to save her now.

He thought swiftly what he could do. There was only one thing. He could follow her to Canalejos, and then when Saturnino had taken her into the *palacio* and wearied of her—then——

The drummer wondered whether he himself could keep such a long, humiliating vigil. It seemed to him that he could; indeed it seemed the only thing possible for him to do.

Ever again to make a gesture of deserting her was an impossible thing for Thomas Strawbridge. Among all the women in the world she alone was for him; she was a very part of himself.

He put his arms around her.

"Listen, Dolores," he whispered solemnly. "No matter what comes, as long as I have life I will follow you; no matter what happens I will wait for you."

He kissed her gently on the cheek and pressed her face to his.

"I will not forsake you, Dolores——"

AMID his murmuring came a shout across the water.

"Hola, Señor Americano! Is that *Señor Americano! Canastos, hombre,* you are wanted!"

Strawbridge looked at the gathering torches with the calmness of a man who at least has his future planned. He stood up in the canoe.

"Ho, yes!" he shouted loudly. "Come ahead; I am the American!"

Canoes were gathering now from every direction, and their lights began to illuminate his own boat. Still he could see little of the gathering flotilla, for each torch was set in front of a little tin reflector and flung all its light forward. From the dimly seen figures came a voice saying:

"An order from Canalejos, *señor.* We are to detain you and *la señora!"*

"Yes, I had supposed so."

A pause; then the voice said—

"We have been watching for you day and night, *señor."*

The American wearied instantly of this polite Spanish circumlocution.

"Oh, well—now that you've got us what are you going to do with us?"

"If you will accompany me to my ship, *señor*— Perhaps you recognize me; we had a very pleasant afternoon together once, I am Capitán Vargas of the *Concepcion Inmaculada."*

He twisted the light about in his boat and exhibited not a canoe, but himself and a number of peon oarsmen in a jolly-boat.

Strawbridge looked at his good-natured face, and the fact that he should have fallen in with this captain who would have been so easily bribed amid a crowd where such bribing was impossible was the last touch of ironic fortune. It filled him with such bitterness that he ran his tongue about his mouth as if the flavor were on his palate.

"Yes, I remember you very well. So you are still here."

"That is true, but I sail at once. I am in the Rio Negran Navy now, both me and my *Concepcion Inmaculada.* I am a captain. I am a captain in the insurgent Navy."

It was true. Captain Vargas wore a blue coat trigged with much gold braid. Coronel Saturnino had caught him through his vanity.

A rope had been tossed over the prow of the canoe, and now the whole fleet of small boats approached the lights of a schooner that lay in the harbor of San Geronimo. This was the old schooner *Concepcion Inmaculada,* now the solitary ship in the insurgent Navy.

Beyond the black rigging of the ship Strawbridge could see the silhouettes of the long row of palms which decorated the waterfront. The schooner lay exactly where the drummer had seen her after the battle of San Geronimo.

The small boats pulled up alongside the captain, and the captives went on board. The old tub evidently had been laden during the interim, for now she smelled strongly of balata and tonka beans.

Captain Vargas led the way briskly across-decks and down the little hatchway into the cabin. Two oil lamps lighted this place, and when the captain stepped into it the gold braid on his new uniform shone more brightly than ever. He went over to the ship's chest, opened it and drew out an envelop.

"I have a writ here for you, Señor Strawbridge," he explained politely. "It was very necessary to intercept you; that is why all San Geronimo turned out to be sure you were brought in."

"Yes—you seemed enthusiastic."

Captain Vargas smiled politely. He was a little more polite, a little stiffer and not quite so friendly now that he was in a uniform.

"Now if the *señora* will have that chair—She must be weary——"

He drew about a chair and assisted her to it with elaborate courtesy. The Spanish woman sat down, looking from the captain to Strawbridge and back again with her dark, slightly unfocused eyes.

Vargas then bowed again and handed the envelop to the drummer. It was a Government official envelop with a large seal. The American opened it, moistened his lips, then held it under the light of an oil lamp and read:

Señor TOMAS STRAWBRIDGE,
Late of Canalejos, Rio Negro.
Excellentissimo Señor:—

You are hereby instructed to proceed immediately to Rio de Janeiro with the *Concepcion Inmaculada,* taking full command of her cargo of balata and tonka beans, also of the gold coin and specie on board as set forth in the ship's manifest, deliver this cargo to the consignee in Rio Janeiro, and with the proceeds therefor purchase the arms and ammunition as heretofore set out in a contract entered into by the Government of Rio Negro of the first part and the corporation which you represent, as party of the second part. This former contract is hereby fully validated by the newly established Government of Rio Negro.

I have the honor to be, *el mas excellentissimo señor, su muy humilde servidor,*

DELGOA, *Minister of War.*

This surprizing letter had a postscript written in a different, and indeed in almost an illegible, hand. Its extraordinarily bad Spanish for several minutes baffled the drummer's ability to translate it, but at length he made out:

MY DEVOTED *Camarado:*

You left Canalejos to attend to some other detail of your gigantic plans just in the moment of local victory. However, I saw my opportunity and seized it. The moment Coronel Saturnino shot down good Father Benicio at the door of the cathedral when the father was trying to protect la Señora Fombombo, that moment I knew Coronel Saturnino had gone too far. I knew the saints would overthrow such a blasphemous murderer.

I raised the banner of revolt against him. All the peons and half his own army turned against him at once.

I had no difficulty in capturing him. He is now lodged in La Fortuna in its vilest cell. He eats nothing but maggoty bread and drinks the river water that seeps into his dungeon. I have him soundly thrashed three times a day.

Also I have placed in prison all the palace guards and all the old Government officials and their sympathizers. Be assured none of them will ever get out except in sacks. I am determined that in Rio Negro shall reign liberty, equality and fraternity. That is why all aristocrats shall stay in La Fortuna.

All the rooms in the *palacio* are occupied, but Madruja is very ill.

PP.S. I have also recaptured a large number of reds and have set them to digging the foundation of a magnificent bull ring.

FELIPE, *el Libertador.*
First Constitutional
President of the
Free and Independent
Republic of
Rio Negro.

THE END

"CIGARET?"

by Leonard H. Nason

WHEN an American soldier met a French soldier the process of becoming acquainted usually followed a regular course. The two would, of course, be unable to speak each other's language; but that was no hindrance. The Frenchman commonly began the conversation, after a few minutes of grinning while the American had been admiring the other's medals and *brisques* (service stripes).

"Cigaret?" the Frenchman would say, smiling.

"Sure!" the American would agree, and would forthwith produce one, tailor-made, or else the materials for constructing one. When the cigarets were going in good shape, the French soldier would uncork his *bidon,* produce a small cup and look questioningly at the American.

"*Pinard?*" he would ask gently.

The light of joy upon the American's face would be answer enough, and the Frenchman would thereupon fill the cup with wine and pass it to his companion. This red wine or *pinard,* as the soldiers called it, had a very harsh, sour taste but its internal action was most agreeable and it exerted a surprising amount of authority once it arrived in the stomach.

After the cup was empty and when the cigarets were about half consumed, the French soldier would begin to pry apart the numerous straps that crossed his breast and supported the half-dozen bags with which he was hung. After he had unbuttoned his overcoat and wriggled convulsively a moment or so, he would produce a photograph, either of some stiffly staring, wide-eyed maiden, or a curly headed youngster, depending on whether he were single or married. The American would examine the picture politely with due respect for the feelings of his companion.

"She's a good looker all right," he would remark. "What do you think of this one?" at the same time producing a picture of his own girl from the interior of his blouse. The French soldier would examine this and then blow a kiss heavenward, exclaiming, "OO la, la!" in tones of greatest rapture and admiration. The cigarets and pinard would again circulate, and the two would consider themselves fast friends.

Pro Patria

An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

by George E. Holt

Author of "Chestnuts," "A Certain Rich Man," etc.

UPON a certain day as Mohamed Ali lay in safe retreat among the Atlas foot-hills word came to him which caused his eyelids to tighten in quick anger. This news concerned one Sid Afned ibn Nasser, basha of the town of Tetwan, and it ran, with considerable convincing detail, to the effect that Sid Afned had succumbed to the temptations of a German political agent and had promised both allegiance and action in the cause of the All-Highest—for a consideration.

Now at this time Morocco was being strangled by European intrigue, especially that of Germany and France. Both these nations desired that Morocco should become one of their colonies or at least that a "protectorate" might be established over the Shareefian Empire. The word does not mean quite what it seems to; it is a diplomatic term, and it signifies that the privilege of exploiting and looting a given domain is restricted to the power establishing the "protectorate." Some people, being poorly informed, believe that the protection is for the householder instead of for the housebreaker.

Morocco, being vastly valuable, was well worth winning. Wherefore France and Germany spared no pains in the effort, at first to secure "interests" which later could be used as an excuse for military interference in Moroccan affairs, which in turn would necessarily demonstrate the inability of the empire to govern itself, thus making a protectorate necessary and securing the approval of all the world powers who stand stanchly for peace and order. It was to require another decade—and a world war—to demonstrate vividly the altruism of Europe. And as it manifestly is difficult for a Frenchman or a German to cause localized disturbances where he is not, both French and German nationals had been swarming into Morocco at the request of their Governments, with the patriotic intention—also at the request of the same powers—to make just as much trouble for the Sultan as was humanly possible.

At this time France was strong in the north and Germany in the south, wherefore it behooved each to get action in the enemy's territory, thus interfering with whatever plans the opposing nation might have. And the only thing which stood between the Sultan and ruin by these civilized powers who had invaded his domains with robbery intent, was the faithfulness of the great kaids, the governors of provinces, and the bashas of cities and towns, with their humble followers. But the reward for treason had become so great that the lesser men among them had begun to waver in their allegiance—and a few had fallen.

Now Mohamed Ali was an outlaw by the Sultan's order, and there were unclaimed rewards upon his head; but it is one thing to defy the ruler of one's own land in order to evade unjust punishment and quite

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another thing to betray that ruler and that land to the vultures of Europe. At least this was the mind of Mohamed Ali upon the matter; wherefore the tightening of the eyelids and the generous curse with which he qualified the name of Sid Afned, basha of Tetwan.

Being a man of action and to tell the truth somewhat bored by a considerable period of inactivity, Mohamed Ali followed his curse by a time of deep reflection as to the possibilities offered by the situation. The tale of the traitor basha, as it had come to him, was this: Near Tetwan city was a German milling establishment, newly constructed, at the head of which was Herr Herman Schenk. The proposal—beautiful in its simplicity—was for the basha to arrange with certain of his mountaineers to seize the person of Herr Schenk and to work some little damage to the milling plant.

Herr Schenk, in arranging the matter, had been careful to place emphasis upon the fact that the mountaineers who were to hold him captive should fully understand that he was to be looked upon as an honored guest while among them—and that none of the machinery was to be damaged. Herr Schenk was a cautious man, even while working for *der Vaterland.*

These things being accomplished, the German minister would loudly demand redress from the Sultan, would probably secure indemnity for the mistreatment of a peaceful German citizen, remuneration for the wrecking of the milling plant, and—still more important—would be able to point out to the world the manifest inability of the Sultan to maintain order in his dominions without the aid of Germany. A number of colonial empires have been built upon this simple principle.

"And so that *wild-el-haram*, that fatherless one who is the basha of Tetwan, thinks he has the head for such a thing!"

Thus growled Mohamed Ali after a little time of thought.

"Let us see. Let us see. He has a head which, *I* think, would look well over the Fez gate. At any rate, it would there be of little value to the Kaiser."

And he clapped his hands in summons to certain of his followers.

The information which had come to Mohamed Ali was correct in every particular, a thing which was possible perhaps only because Tetwan was the native town of the outlaw and his family, and therefore contained many of his relatives and friends. A cousin had brought the news, and an uncle had secured it—he being *kadi*, or judge, of the town, and therefore occupying an excellent observation post.

Wherefore in due course and according to schedule Herr Schenk sat placidly in his office one evening, puffing an enameled pipe with pink cupids dancing around the bowl, waiting for the arrival of the mountaineers who should carry him off into captivity. Upon the office table stood a black handbag containing tobacco and a bottle of *schnapps* and such other articles as Herr Schenk considered necessary to the peace and comfort of his fat body and fatter mind during his sojourn among the hills. And in his pocket was a small bundle of high-power bank-notes; the balance due the basha, whose messenger was to accompany the raiders—Herr Schenk being a careful man, and disbelieving in payment in full for a service still unrendered.

A scene of tranquillity—into which oozed a big brown man, clad in the brown homespun *djellaba* of the mountaineers, his hood dropped so that his face was in shadow.

"*Ach*, you haf come," said Herr Schenk—or as nearly as he could say it in the little Arabic at his disposal. "Vell, I am ready. Ve go, yess?"

"We go speedily," answered the brown figure.

"But vere iss der messenger from der basha? I haf moneys for him."

"We can not wait for him. We must ride. Keep the money until later."

This suited Herr Schenk very well. Perhaps later would never come. One could never be certain of a thing in this strange country.

THE ROSE, emptied his pipe and put it in the bag, extinguished the lamp and followed the silhouette of the big brown man into the starlight. There he was assisted on to a horse equipped with a big native saddle—which made his legs project like outriggers—and between two other horsemen, one of whom carried his black bag, he rode off. He turned once to look back, and saw black ghosts hovering about the place.

"Vell, it vill be quite a yoke, no?"

He smiled complacently as he addressed the inquiry to the big man who rode at his right.

"*Aiwa*—yes," was the slow assent. "Oh, yes—it will be quite a joke."

They rode swiftly for half an hour; then as they swung around a little hill a yellow square of light marked the open door of a house. Here they drew rein.

"We stop here a little," said Herr Schenk's captor. "Dismount."

Herr Schenk slid awkwardly and heavily from his saddle; the others stood aside to let him pass. Then, entering the house, which was unoccupied save for a small boy who manifestly was guardian of the lamp, the big brown man closed the door and threw a bar across it. The German, accustomed to native life and aching somewhat from the ride, sat down upon the poor mattress which lay at one side of the room, reached into his bag and drew forth his bottle.

He raised it to his lips, stopped and lowered it slowly while his pale, protruding eyes swelled with amazement. The big brown man stood before him, the hood of his *djellaba* thrown back, and his black-bearded face pictured with a grin of rather boyish delight.

"*Mein Gott!*"

It was a prayer rather than an exclamation.

"*Mein—Gott!* You are—you are—Mohamed Ali—the outlaw!"

The big brown man bowed.

"Mohamed Ali—but *not* at the Kaiser's service."

"Ach—something iss wrong here."

Herr Schenk set the bottle carefully back in the bag.

"Yess—something iss wrong."

"Not at all," Mohamed Ali reassured him. "Matters are precisely as Allah has willed."

"But—but you are not der von who vas to——"

Herr Schenk stopped suddenly on the precipice of an indiscretion.

"Who was to what?" asked Mohamed Ali innocently.

"Nodings, nodings."

The German's words were hurried.

"But vot do your men at der mill?"

Characteristically he thought of his property before himself.

"Oh, they will take it to pieces and send it to your Kaiser as a gift, I suppose. At least I am sure as to the first part. Was not that what you desired?"

"Ach—no—the machinery, it iss not to be damaged. That iss——"

Chattering now, he rose to unsteady feet.

"Vot iss this thing? For vy do you come und carry me off und destroy my mill? You are an outlaw—a robber—a t'ief—a bandit——"

"But not a German," offered Mohamed Ali quietly.

"Und vot do you intend to do mit me? Der Cherman Minister, he vill haf a varship in Tangier bay——"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Mohamed Ali's laugh swelled the walls of the little house.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! The German Minister will have a warship in Tangier bay—to try to find out who tied the carcass of Herr Schenk to the door of the Legation."

The German paled; Mohamed Ali's eccentric humor was not unknown to him.

"You vould not dare—" he began; but the outlaw cut him short.

"As Allah is my witness, if you do not all the things which I order I shall shoot you myself, and I will hang your fat carcass on his German Excellency's door-knocker."

Now Herr Schenk read truth in Mohamed Ali's face, from which all humor had fled, and he knew that the black vulture Death hovered over the little mud-plastered house—waiting for him. He licked his lips and swallowed twice; then—

"Und vot iss it you vant me to do?" he asked.

Mohamed Ali took from his big leather *shakarah* a few sheets of paper and a fountain pen—he was not entirely unacquainted with the equipments of European civilization. The boy at his bidding brought the lantern and the little eight-inch-high table it had been sitting upon.

"Sit now and write as I order," commanded Mohamed Ali.

"In Cherman, yess?" queried Herr Schenk, squatting beside the table.

"In German, yess," echoed the outlaw.

"But—do you understand Cherman?"

"None at all. Nevertheless write in that language. And write thus:

> "I, Herman Schenk, a political agent of the Kaiser confess that for the sum of five hundred pounds sterling——"

Herr Schenk looked up quickly and as quickly resumed writing.

> "—have bribed Sid Afned ibn Nasser, basha of Tetwan, to create trouble for his master the Sultan by having certain mountaineers seize my person and hold me for ransom; also——"

The German's face had grown pale; the hand which held the pen trembled; but he wrote on in his large script.

> "also——

but wait."

Mohamed Ali took the paper and turned to the third man.

"Let us read this, Mustapha," he said, "in order that we may not waste time. Fortunately you have lived a little while in Germany and thus can read this devil-scrawl."

As Mustapha took the paper and bent toward the light, Herr Schenk made noises in his throat like a hen's clucking, then reached over and secured his bottle, on which he drew heavily. Mustapha read—

> "I, Herr Herman Schenk, a political agent of the All-Highest, am being held prisoner by the outlaw Mohamed Ali and am being forced——"

"Enough!" cried Mohamed Ali, seizing the paper and tearing it. "Here is another sheet, you dog—and for a second trick like that I shall have you buried alive—with your bottle of liquor. Now write."

Herr Schenk now wrote.

And when the writing was done—

"Now, Mustapha, let us witness it," said Mohamed Ali—and tied a tangle of knots in ink in one corner of the sheet.

Mustapha did likewise after reading.

"That iss a yoke also," observed Herr Schenk, on whom the liquor had begun to work. "Vitness—Mohamed Ali—outlaw, t'ief—a fine vitness!"

But to him Mohamed Ali paid no attention. This statement—in the right hands—would effectually silence all German lips as to the occurrences of this night; even Germany would not have the face to mention these matters.

"But vot you do mit such a statement?" went on Herr Schenk. "It iss no goot. Der Sultan——"

"I am going to send it to the French Minister," Mohamed Ali told him gently. "You had not thought of that, eh?"

"*Ach, mein Gott,* no! The French Pig-Minister! But that vill inchure Cherman interests very much. You vould not do that?"

Mohamed Ali stared at him in amazement; he and the rest of the world had yet to learn of the auto-hypnosis possible to the Kaiser's people.

"*Allah!*" breathed Mohamed Ali; and again, "*Allah kerim!*"

BUT there were other matters to think of now besides the naive stupidity of this German agent, and Mohamed Ali went at them with Mustapha. And shortly he unbarred the door and threw it open.

"Guard him until I return," he instructed Mustapha. "And, yes; take from him the money he has with him to pay the basha. That we can give the poor of Tetwan in the name of—let us see—ah yes; in the name of Kaiser Wilhelm."

Laughing, he was on his horse and galloping away in the darkness. In the course of half an hour—or about the time that Herr Schenk, relieved of his package of bank-notes and solaced by his bottle, had sunk into a drunken half-slumber—he came to the mill and almost ran into a group of riders who were just leaving. Them he greeted with a question.

"Yes, *sidi;* yes," was the reply. "We have broken everything we could break. Some men of the mountains came while we were about the business, and them we had help us, so that nothing remains unbroken."

Mohamed Ali chuckled.

"And the men of the mountains helped you," he said.

"Yes, *sidi;* they helped. At first, finding us there, they wished to go away, but we—we persuaded them to stay. And they were of much assistance. Also one other came, saying that he was the basha's messenger. Him we tied up and left there. He curses."

"*Allah akbar!*" exclaimed Mohamed Ali, and his laughter, let loose, echoed among the hills.

But in another moment he was serious again.

"We have yet another task," he said. "Let us go back to the mill—or to what *was* the mill—and there I shall tell you what is to be done."

Turning, they rode back. Soon Mohamed Ali left them, to ride swiftly northward, accompanied by a single horseman.

Sunrise of the following day saw Sid Afned, basha of Tetwan, kneeling devoutly upon his crimson prayer rug, bowing toward the east where lies the foundation-stone of Islam. Scarcely had he risen when an attendant, who had been awaiting the conclusion of his devotions, approached and spoke swiftly. Sid Afned's face showed surprize.

"Herr Schenk!" he exclaimed. "He is—he is still in Tetwan? I understood—— And you say he desires to see me at once at the mill?"

"Thus his messenger requested," assented the attendant. "And he bade me refer to a matter of three hundred pounds sterling, which you would understand."

Sid Afned was at a loss; he had ascertained *before* prayer that his messenger had not yet returned. Now if Herr Schenk was still at the mill it was obvious that something had gone wrong. And as there was the matter of three hundred pounds at stake Sid Afned quickly decided that a prompt and personal investigation was desirable. But as it would be inadvisable for the basha of Tetwan to declare too loudly his interests in whatever might have transpired or whatever might in the future transpire, he resolved to ride alone to the mill, and as unostentatiously as possible.

Thus it came about that within half an hour his horse carried him to the door of the mill office. There Sid Afned sat a moment, viewing with questioning eyes many evidences that at least a part of the plan had been carried out. Piles of débris which had once been office furniture and equipment, other piles of boards and belts and wheels which had once coordinated as milling-machinery and still other piles of once snow-like flour were monuments to the efforts of certain painstaking mountaineers.

There was no one in sight; but suddenly fear smote the basha and twisted his stomach. He tightened the reins to swing his horse about—and a deep calm voice halted the movement as if paralysis had bound his muscles.

In the office doorway stood a big brown figure aiming an automatic pistol at the heart of Sid Afned. But the basha scarcely observed the menace of the pistol; the face above it was thrice as deadly.

"Allah!"

It came as a groan.

"Mohamed Ali!"

"Enter, and be silent," ordered the outlaw.

As fear had smitten him before, panic now seized the basha. With a cry he dug the sharp corners of his metal stirrups into his horse's ribs and jerked viciously upon the bit. The horse reared, turned and plunged; then Mohamed Ali's automatic roared, and animal and rider crashed to earth. At the same moment half a dozen brown-clad men ran from behind the building.

"See to the horse at once," commanded Mohamed Ali, standing over the basha, who lay where the horse had thrown him. "He is not badly hurt. As for this dog, bind him and put him upon another horse. Also, draw his hood down so that none may recognize him. We ride at once."

A man ran and brought horses. Mohamed Ali swung into saddle, whence he watched his men bind the basha, hoist him into a seat and tie him on. This being done, the outlaw set out at a pace which very shortly took them to the little house wherein a drunken German awaited his broken tool.

The basha's wrists were untied, and he was thrust into the little room where a fat man, whose protruding blue eyes were now ringed with red, squatted upon a filthy mattress, an empty bottle beside him. At sight of the basha the eyes grew redder still and the hands twitched. The German political agent who has failed at the task assigned him has little to hope for in this world—except death.

"Black pig! Traitor! Illegitimate!"

Vituperation of the basha rolled from his lips like water from an open tap, without emphasis but with deadly venom.

And now the native pride of Sid Afned, basha of Tetwan, rose above all other emotions, seized and shook him for a tense moment. Then he plunged upon the squatting German, and no hand was interposed. His knife flashed, but almost at the same moment Herr Schenk drew from his vest pocket a tiny dagger, not longer than one of his pudgy fingers—the poisoned trinket he carried as a passport to the next world——

SID AFNED rose and glowered down upon the crimson-stained thing which sprawled upon the mattress gazing with protruding blue eyes upon the black vulture, Death; he looked upon the dripping curved *kumiah* in his hand—and with a sneer upon a little cut Herr

Schenk's trinket had made upon his wrist.

With a grunt he threw his *kumiah* from him and straightened up. But as he made to speak a trembling seized him, his knees grew weak and a film gathered before his eyes.

"*Allah!*" he cried. "I—I——"

He sank to the floor and straightened convulsively in the rigor of death.

"Prussic acid works quickly," observed Mohamed Ali to his men. "Almost as quickly as a *kumiah*. And thus ends this matter—as Allah manifestly intended it should end. Praise be to the holy name of Allah! Let us ride."

Thus it came about that the German Minister announced publicly his deep regret at the death of Herr Schenk and Sid Afned ibn Nasser, basha of Tetwan, who, as he pointed out, manifestly had had an unfortunate disagreement.

This was after the French Minister had permitted him to read the last document signed by Herr Schenk.

Pete Horner's Miracle

by Walter Inland

PETE HORNER looked at his nineteen-year-old son, Jim, with the most hard-boiled expression that even his sun-baked face could assume. Outside the ranch-house an August sun parched the ground. Ten miles away, clearly visible, a line of sharp-peaked hills jutted up; and beyond these, across the Rio Grande, lay Old Mexico. It was partly what was in Old Mexico and partly what Jim had just said that had brought the stormy look into the old ranchman's eyes.

Ever since Jim had been big enough to have a mind of his own Pete Horner had never been able to "size him up." Jim had always been interested in things that his hard-riding, hard-headed parent thought, and on every occasion called, hifalutin foolishness. The growing boy, being naturally silent, had said little, but had held hard to his own way. It was surprizing how far along on his own way this method had brought Jim in spite of old Pete Horner's well-meant but unbending opposition.

Jim had got his own way about going to school in San Antonio. There he took naturally to chemistry and soon was far ahead of his class, quickly completing all the courses the school had to offer. Of course he wanted to go on to one of the big Eastern scientific schools where he could get the training that would give him a chance to lead in his chosen profession.

Pete Horner had just heard for the first time of this hard and fixed purpose from Jim's lips. Apparently it threatened to send him into apoplexy on the spot.

"——!" boomed the irate ranchman. "What fool notions will you be lassoin' next? Haven't I already give you enough rope? Didn't I let you go to San Antone when you should've been here learnin' to ranch like a man? You don't know a thing 'bout your own father's business. You've got soft an' full o' triflin' idees, I reckon. Now you wanta run off an' wear horn-rimmed spectacles an' pink silk shirts an' patent-leather shoes an——”

At last sheer anger choked Pete, while floods of perspiration rolled down his bald forehead.

“It ain't that, pa—” Jim started patiently; but Pete interrupted.

In spite of his real affection for his son, Pete was stung by a deeper hurt than Jim even suspected, and at his next speech the boy's face, too, went white with anger.

“I'm goin' to tell you somethin' straight,” the older man resumed, stepping nearer and looking into Jim's eyes. “When you got through at San Antone I thought you'd be *through*; but you've done nothin' but study an' fool with a lot o' truck that's just worthless in this country, ever since June.

“You've been doin' that this Summer when every self-respectin' cow man has been busy fightin' them cattle-thievin', women-killin' Mexican savages that our Government won't keep off us. Well, do you know what everybody's sayin' and what I've tried an' tried not to think, but now, by ——, I can't help believin'——”

“Yes?” said Jim hardly above a whisper, and his eyes looked just like the double of old Pete's.

“They're callin' you a coward, that's what!”

“Whoever says that is a —— li——”

Jim checked himself with a violent effort. Both men were trembling with anger now.

It was true that Jim had been studying hard all Summer while various distant ranches had been raided by ferocious greaser bands from across the river; but it was also true that he would have been ready to do his part at any moment needed. There had always been more than enough volunteers to meet the situation, and if he were going to get into the Boston school that he wanted to enter in the Autumn, he had to put in every minute studying for the examinations. Now it seemed every one—and his own father—was calling him a coward, the most contemptible name a man could bear in that country.

Pete saw the change in Jim's face and secretly felt a little relief. The young cub could get mad at least. But what if his boy were a coward, a softy? The thought had tortured Pete through long, hot nights.

A sudden inspiration came to him and cooled his anger. He would find out about Jim right now.

“All right, Jim,” he said in a changed tone. “If you've got to go away in spite of all I say we'll talk about it later. I want you to do something for me now. Tom Crowley come over from the west range today and reported cattle disappearin' a few at a time.

“I'm dead certain it's those two thievin' greasers next us. Them ——-fer-sartain —— from Mexico don't work on small stuff and have never been in a hundred miles of the west range. So it won't be needful for any more'n you and Tom to go there.

“Of course,” added the old rancher probably without meaning it as it sounded, “if there was Mexicans from across the river I wouldn't ask you to go, but they ain't, and we're short-handed now. Besides, you see, if you go out there with Tom and sort of do something people'll get a different idee——”

Pete paused irresolutely and looked at his son. Still white and shaking under the insult that had come so near to him, Jim replied in a perfectly cool voice:

“Sure, pa; I'll go—for six weeks, until it's time to go East.”

“Oh, Lord!” groaned Pete Horner, now over his mad spell. “Nothin' but a roarin', blazin' miracle'll ever make us two drive in double harness, Jim.”

JIM was packing hurriedly in the detached shack that he had fitted up as a makeshift laboratory when Tom Crowley appeared unasked at the door. Tom was an undersized, lean old cow-puncher with legs so bowed that one wouldn't believe it at first sight, and a long pear-shaped head covered with bushy red hair. He was naturally morose and bad-tempered unless people knew exactly how to handle him, and just now he was in the worst possible humor because the boss was sending him back with Jim.

All the cowboys laughed at Jim because of his quietness and “idees,” though they had liked him well enough until the ugly rumors about his lack of nerve had begun to get about, turning them against him. Jim knew well that Crowley did not want to go with him and would be as unpleasant as he could unless the boy found some way to win over his simple, childish nature. So ria

though he was busy sorting out some materials with which to while away the lonely evenings at the isolated west-range shack, he stopped and tried to make the short-tempered cowboy like him a little better.

"What'n —— you doin, now?" inquired Tom testily. "We've got to be movin' in less than an hour. You're not takin' that foolishness with you, I reckon," he added disgustedly, eying Jim's littered work-room.

Jim grinned.

"Just a few things, Tom, and two or three books—since we're driving over in the grub-wagon."

But Tom was far from m[illegible]ified and continued to gaze at the arrays of reagent bottles, racks, test-tubes and containers that lined the rough board walls. Jim absent-mindedly lifted the cover from a quart metal container, and a whiff of concentrated dead fish made even Tom catch his hardened breath.

"What'n ——'s the good of keepin' rotten fish lyin' around?" he roared. "It ain't even decent."

Now Jim laughed so that Tom had to grin a little.

"You didn't guess quite right, Tom. That's a whole quart of match dope I got out of the commercial laboratory at San Antone, a mixture of white phosphorus, potassium chlorate and glue," he added gravely.

"Well," said Tom as if conceding a point, "at least I've heard o' *glue*, but I don't reckon anybody'd use it if it smelled like that."

Jim thought of a little trick that might tickle the funny old codger.

"Let me fix your watch for you," he said offhandedly.

"*My* watch!" grunted Tom indignantly. "Why, they ain't a watch in Adobe County kin race this'n," he declared, pulling forth from deep in his corduroy pants an enormous silver contraption, thick as a muffin and wound with a key. "She may be a bit old-fashioned, but she's steady as the North Star."

"Just the same, you can't see it in the dark—like the North Star."

"Aw—go on."

"Let me have it a minute—I won't hurt it."

Tom suspiciously handed the heavy timepiece to Jim and anxiously watched him pry off the crystal and with a fine-pointed instrument paint the hands and dial numbers with the gluey substance, which dried almost immediately. Jim knew that a watch thus illuminated with phosphorus rather than the various fluoresent salts used in commerce for that purpose, would retain luminosity for a comparatively short period only; but since Tom had never heard of an illuminated dial this would seem smart enough to him.

"Now come in and look at it," Jim laughed, and, pulling Crowley into a dark closet with him, closed the door.

"Well, I'll be goshdarned hornswoggled!" almost shouted the astonished Tom as faintly, with ghostly whitish green glimmerings, the hands and numerals stood out in the darkness until they seemed suspended alone, isolated points of cold, live fire before him. "Well, I'm roped and tied, Jim," he finished, pleased as a boy and still wondering.

Tom was still in a good humor when, an hour later, side by side on the spring seat of the grub-wagon, with Jim's stuff carefully packed by Tom himself in the wagon, the two men headed into the west. And the crusty old cowpuncher no longer held the quiet, slim boy beside him in contempt.

THE Horner ranch-house stood about in the center of Pete's square, solidly blocked-in property; yet the west-range shack where Jim had gone with Tom to "get the goods" on the petty cattle thieves was nearly fifty miles as the crow flies up the river. Such was the extent of the holdings which Pete Horner by the hardest work had acquired in a lifetime of hardship and danger.

Five days after Jim's departure Pete's telephone rang, and when he answered he heard the voice of his San Antonio banker speaking from the distant city. The banker, Harold Decker, wanted to tell him that a raid by Mexican bandits had just been reported from a border ranch forty miles still farther west than the west range. In that sparsely settled country news nearly always traveled first to San Antonio and then filtered out over the single telegraph and telephone lines that ran far back into the cattle lands.

Decker thought this news of special importance to his friend because theretofore all the raids, as Pete had said to Jim, had occurred east of Horner's holdings, more than a hundred miles from the scene of this new outbreak. The raid had occurred two days earlier. Two ranch-houses, had been burned and two families murdered.

Pete hung up the receiver and yelled to a man to saddle his horse. It was about ten in the morning when he started, and he rode as hard as he dared in the terrible heat. About five in the afternoon he reached the house of his foreman, Henry Jenings, and dismounted stiff, blistered and ready to cave in with thirst. He shouted, and Mrs. Jenings came out of the house.

"Why, Mr. Horner!" she exclaimed nervously. "We didn't expect to see you. Come right in. It's funny you should turn up right when I was wishin' you might. Your boy come by four days ago with Tom Crowley, and now I wish to the Lord he had of stayed as we advised him to—until we could get the straight of the rumors goin' about. I'm that worried an' all——"

The lonely, hard-worked woman spoke in a high-pitched voice that whined nervously.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Jenings? Where's Henry?"

"That's just it, Mr. Horner. I don't know. There's a man from the XB outfit out on the range lookin' for him and the two boys now," Mrs. Jenings informed him plaintively.

The woman's vague, hysterical manner irritated Pete, but he kept calm. Not until she had automatically set food and coffee before him did he try to question her again, though he noticed her continually turning to the window and peering anxiously across the desolate, empty landscape.

"What's up?" he then demanded shortly.

"Well," said Mrs. Jenings slowly, "four days ago, jest afore your Jim and Tom Crowley come along, one of the XB boys come over and said there was mighty definite rumors that Greaser Gonzales himself had crossed the river somewhere west with a bunch o' his cutthroat devils——"

The woman stopped again, and Horner boomed—

"Yes—go on, quick!"

His tired face took on a wild look now.

Greaser Gonzales was one of Villa's most notorious henchmen, and twice already Pete had been with parties that had had running fights with the Mexican and his gang, who were blamed for the most heartless and useless atrocities on the border. Gonzales, a terribly perverted and superstitious man, was in reality insane on the subject of all "gringoes"—white men—and several times had shown that he placed torture and wanton murder before mere loot as the object of his forays.

Horner knew Gonzales right enough and Gonzales knew Horner, too. The Ranchmen's Association, of which Pete was president, was offering a flat five thousand dollars for Greaser Gonzales, dead or alive, and all the notices of that reward bore Horner's name.

If Greaser Gonzales got hold of Jim, Pete's boy, alive it would not be a question of even a half-million ransom. It wouldn't even be a clean, quick death for the boy. It would be the longest-lasting mutilation and torture that insane and bestial savagery could invent. With his own eyes Pete had seen what was left of some of Gonzales' victims, and the merest suggestion of Jim alive in that wild beast's power simply froze his blood, drove him mad.

"Go on, I tell you!"

The woman looked at his face and was frightened.

"We tried to get your Jim not to go on—leastways not until he found out more about that report," she continued in a shaky voice; "but he only looked sort of quiet and said a lot of wild yarns oughtn't to scare anybody. I kinda felt he thought we would think he was scared to go if he waited.

"He said he and Tom could always make a getaway when it was necessary; it was too soon to run then; and Tom said as how he'd go on if Jim did, and he didn't believe them reports nohow. So off they went, and today about three the XB boy come back here with real news o' that raid and sayin' as how they'd found pore Mrs. Johns with her haid cut clean off an' her three little ones dead around her and——"

"All right," snapped Pete in a voice like sharp steel. "Where's the XB boy now?"

"He's out huntin' Henry and the two hired men on the range. When he finds 'em he said they'd come back on their way to the XB where three more'll join 'em, and then they'll beat it over to the west range and see what's up. So's please don't you start off by yourself, Mr. Horner. They're sure to come along right soon I reckon."

For a moment Pete Horner's seasoned judgment made him stop and think.

Gonzales' bunch would number ten at least and probably twice that number—and there was now no doubt in Pete's mind that the bandits would head straight east from their last raid, to the isolated house where Jim and Tom Crowley were alone. It was just common sense to wait for a reasonable number of men—just plain horse sense.

He looked irresolutely across the mesquite-dotted range where the lowering sun was now laying infinitely long golden fingers of light, but what he saw was Jim's white, set face as Pete had hurled the word "coward" at him. Jim hadn't waited. Jim had gone right on to his job. What a —— fool thing to do—what a tough, nervy, unscared thing to do! Pete turned sharply to Mrs. Jenings.

"When the men come, tell'm I said to ride on over to the west-range shack *hard*—don't matter how many horses they kill. I'm goin' on now."

In five minutes he had saddled a fresh pony and was once more swinging westward into the sunset. As he rode a chilly, creeping fear grew ever stronger in him. Why—why in God's name had he sent Jim off into this? He hadn't had any decent right to take any such chance with the boy. All the time in his heart he had known that Jim was not made for this sort of life, Jim who was just naturally born liking quiet and study and books.

Jim was no match for this country, which didn't rate book brains any higher'n a prairie-dog's hole—that sort of brains was just as easy to blow out as any sort and usually couldn't begin to take care o' themselves. What could Jim do in a tight place that any old hard-seasoned cowpuncher might wiggle out of? Ten to one if the greasers outnumbered him, he would let them take him alive—and then——

Into Pete Horner's face there crept a curious light—the look that comes only to a born fighter's eyes when he has backed to the last wall and squints down the barrel that will spurt death and nothing but death until the last cartridge, until the last breath leaves his body. If only the good God would let him make the west-range shack before Gonzales did——

Pete had ridden away from the Jenings place at about five-thirty, and there were still about twenty-five miles to go to the west-range shack. It was a little cooler now, and a horse could be pushed harder. A little after eight, straining his gaze far ahead, Pete saw a sudden great puff of greasy smoke billow up against the orange sky, and as twilight settled down a red glare glowed in the smoke. Cursing unconsciously, Pete forced his horse into a hard gallop, sick with dread.

The flare went out, and the smoke soon disappeared, for the west-range shack was small and tinder-dry. Pete forced his pony on without mercy. As he came to the home corral, about a mile from the site of the shack, which was on a bluff above the river and still hidden by a thicket of mesquite-trees, his horse fell under him. Leaving it to die, Pete strode forward on foot, his Winchester on his arm, alert with all the experienced cunning of a long lifetime on the Southwest plains.

Hope for Jim was practically dead in him now. He was driven on by blind desperation and an all-consuming ferocity. The dense patch of mesquite that grew only a few hundred feet from the shack—or where it had been, for looking cautiously Pete saw only smoldering ashes now—was reached at last, and the old ranchman began to reconnoiter, creeping along in the dense obscurity. He was tired as never in his life he had been before, but he did not know it. There was no more physical sensation left in his galled, aging body. That unbeatable nerve of his which never had flinched and never would was alone alive to the gnawing fear for his boy.

Suddenly he thought he detected a stealthy rustle beside him, and instantly he was young again, tense and swift as an animal before a mortal foe. They would never have got Pete Horner like that; but suddenly in the danger-filled dimness that surrounded him something that dashed his caution to the winds occurred. Just ahead on the fringe of the woods he saw a dark object that he had mistaken for a tree-bole shake a little, quiver and move again. In a tiny gust of hot breeze it swung gently like a pendulum; it oscillated darkly and without a sound. Cold horror seized the old ranchman now. He felt as if he could never make himself approach and recognize that object, swinging gently before him, a dim silhouette against the tree from which it hung.

Then as it swayed, the limp corpse twirled a little and Pete discerned the long hilt of the greasers' favorite weapon, a bowie-knife, jutting from the contour of the figure's breast. A suspense, anguished and unendurable, filled him. His throat contracted, and, uttering an inarticulate cry, he sprang forward, oblivious to everything but the horror of recognition that he feared worse than any death. And as he leaped, two greasers sprang on him from behind, carrying to the ground and disarming him in an instant.

"Let me see! God, I've got to *see!*" he shouted unconsciously before they stuffed a gag into his mouth and jerked him with them as they now ran down the steep path that led to a deep bay in the line of the bluffs, snugly in which, beside the river, Greaser Gonzales had made camp, secure for the night while his men could go out and round up cattle.

Almost instantly the old ranchman recovered his self-control and realized fully what lay before him; but it seemed to him trivial beside the certainty now that he would never know whether Jim had escaped or been tortured to his death. If he should beg this mercy of them, he knew they would lie to him, even if Jim had got away. They would describe to him some horrible death that the boy had suffered. But he would never ask them—for even then, unknown to them, Jim might be lying somewhere near wounded.

Greaser Gonzales would practise every savage ferocity in his catalog without fail that night, but the worst torture of all would be locked in Pete Horner's hairy breast beyond the power of those degenerate savages ever to guess. Handcuffed and gagged as he was, there was yet something majestic and utterly unafraid about old Pete's erect form as he walked up to the bandit chief—something that dwarfed the cruel, filthy figures around him and made even them aware of a flawless courage, a superior and disdainful race.

The gag was now loosened; but Pete stood perfectly silent, gazing unwinking into the bandit chief's baboon-like face, which was indescribably scarred by eruptions of disease. At first Gonzales did not recognize the man before him, and for a moment wild hope of ransom flitted through Pete's mind. Ransom, he knew, was his only chance; for even if Jenings and his men should arrive before they killed him, he would surely be finished off the instant a fight began.

But the bandit chief himself began to turn out the prisoner's pockets and at last drew forth some letters addressed to Peter Horner. A gleam of surprized and ferocious happiness twisted his scabby features into a grin, and without uttering a sound he spat into Pete's calm face. Then he began to speak with the greaser's inborn, oily smoothness.

"*Caramba!*" he spoke softly. "So we have the honor to entertain the mighty lord of the hacienda himself, who is so rich he can offer five thousand gold dollars for the life of just one poor Mexican patriot! Señor Horner, Hernando Gonzales bids you welcome—and what a welcome it is going to be, *señor!*"

He paused an instant with an insinuating, oily leer upon his face; then with a snap like steel springs his features snarled in insane hatred. His long arm shot out amid a stream of oaths. Pete caught a stinging blow across the face, and at the same instant some one tripped him from behind so that he fell prostrate. Greaser Gonzales leaped across the ranchman's body, and, placing his right boot deliberately, delicately, on the old man's head, ground Pete's cheek into the sand.

Not a sound escaped the bound man's lips as they dragged him so close to the camp-fire that his skin cracked in the heat and left him lying there while they took council. Only Pete's proud, steel-cold eyes were free to wander over the starry sky, while the heat tortured him like thousands of stinging insects infesting his worn body, and the dozen figures around him discussed in language he perfectly understood the forms of long agony the night would bring him.

Once more that gruesome witness to these savages' work, the limp body swinging in the breeze, filled his vision. Had Jim, too, lived through such an hour as this? How could Jim have faced it?

THERE was no sense of foreboding in Jim Horner as he came walking leisurely over the star-lit prairie. Out on the range that afternoon his pony had broken its leg in a prairie-dog hole, necessitating a fifteen-mile walk for Jim back to the shack, which he could not reach until rather late; but he was not worried. No one had come to Tom and him with any further stories of bandits working in their section, and they had discovered for certain that the disappearing cattle could be laid at their Mexican neighbors' door.

However, it was now nearly ten o'clock, and he was tired and about starved, so as he drew near the home corral he quickened his pace. Looking ahead expectantly, he paused, a little puzzled. He must be lost. No; he recognized the spot all right but there was no shack to be seen.

Suddenly the pungent, unmistakable odor of burned pine came to him, and his heart leaped. A minute later he stumbled upon the dead pony lying in the road and recognized his father's saddle. The shack was burned, and his father's horse lay dead at his feet—although he had believed his father to be fifty miles away.

Automatically he loosened his revolver, only to recall with bitter self-condemnation that he had shot up his last cartridges at a nest of rattlesnakes he had run across and demolished for amusement. What a thoughtless fool he had been! Now he found himself utterly helpless, unarmed, and there was big trouble all about him. He dived into the dark mesquite, his blood pounding in his temples, his breath, in spite of himself, jerky and difficult.

Creeping along the woods' shadowed fringe, Jim now approached the spot where his father shortly before had been surprized and captured. He heard no sound, no rustling leaves or cracking twigs, though he stood listening with every nerve tense. Every tree was an ambush; and, defenseless, utterly confused by the catastrophe before him, he groped forward, distrusting each mass of shade, the whole threatening darkness.

Yet it was safer there than in the open, he felt. He must reconnoiter, get his bearings first of all. Intent on getting as near as possible to the smoldering ashes of the shack, he started violently as something gently brushed his side, something that shrank away and swung back to brush him again, noiseless, almost wholly indistinct, from the side he had approached, against the outline of a mesquite-tree.

Jim threw out his hand as if to ward off a blow, he knew not what, and felt his fingers sink into Tom Crowley's corduroy breeches, now dank and dripping, still slightly warm. The fetid odor of blood enveloped him, and suddenly he was aware of the faint, slow humming of large flies above him.

A shudder, cold and violent, that seemed to tear apart every fiber of his body shook him, but he turned and seized the body, peering up distractedly into the dim face that dropped so pitifully down toward him. The corpse was suspended by a rope that had been passed under the arms. Tom had not been hanged; he had died fighting, and afterward Greaser Gonzales, as was his method, had strung him up with a knife in his heart for the gringos to find. The bandit chief was fond of leaving such visiting-cards, had built up a name for himself by his pleasant little practical jokes with the corpses of his victims. They were his trade-mark.

Mechanically Jim passed searching hands over his dead companion's form, finding the knife that was sticking in his breast but not the revolver or cartridges that he sought so desperately. The murderers had taken these and must have searched the body hurriedly; but as if to add a last touch to Jim's horror and dread, as he ran his hands down the dead man's thighs, his finger caught in something, and Tom's old watch that he had prized so greatly was jerked out of a pocket, still ticking loudly in the dark stillness. It was almost as if the old cowboy's voice were sounding again in Jim's ears.

For an instant sheer horror almost overcame him. The watch slipped through his nerveless fingers and dangled from its chain down the limp leg, its dial still faintly luminous, grotesquely visible. The boy's breathing became a series of noiseless, racking sobs. Here was the last of Tom; but where was his father, who, the dead horse proved, must have played some part in the sickening tragedy?

Jim no longer stayed in the woods; he no longer seemed to care what happened to him. He stepped quickly forward to the ruins of the shack and on beyond, down a slope that led to the bluff's edge.

There he saw with an instant's faint hope that an unused shed which he had taken possession of as a work-place had not been fired. Perhaps by some chance he might find his Winchester there, or some ammunition for his revolver, though he knew all these had been left in the shack.

A little beyond and to the right of the shed the gaunt wooden frame of a windlass which was used for hauling water-buckets up a slim wire cable that ran to a spring on the river-bank below was also left standing; but everything else, the small barn and the tool-house, had been fired.

He entered the shed and looked round with the aid of matches, only to find his hope dashed. He had left no weapons there; and if he had they would have disappeared, for his laboratory stuff had been ransacked and tossed about, though only some glass bottles seemed broken.

It was while scratching about in this débris, still faintly hoping for ammunition, that he first became aware of the bandits' voices, which rose, faintly audible from their camp at the foot of the bluff. He could make out the liquid Spanish syllables, but not enough to understand; and, stepping into the open, he detected the voices' direction.

Caution returned to him. Carefully he crawled forward, approaching the bluff's edge in the shelter of the windlass-stand, which with some coils of rope tackle and the large bucket, afforded some cover.

When he got to this structure breathlessly he drew himself up to a standing posture and peered from behind it along the slanting cable which led directly over a scene, the first glance at which sent him reeling backward. The picture he looked down on was such that he would gladly have given his own chance at escape for just one bullet with which to end his father's life. Still in the glow of the fire, which now had burned to a heap of red coals, he recognized his father's figure, spread face upward and staked to the ground by the widely extended hands and feet; and even as he looked he saw men shove a branding-iron into the coals.

Greaser Gonzales' tricks were known. When the iron was white-hot it would be touched ever so lightly to his father's eyes. And after that, when they had blinded him, mutilation as only greaser bandits understand it would begin—so cunning, so skilful, that death might be removed for hours while agony was piled on massive agony until the will broke, then the mind, leaving at last only a quivering beast-body, loathsome, hideous and defiled.

So near Jim was that the soft, cruel laughter of the greasers, the slurringly sweet tones of their degraded Spanish, came to him as if he were sitting in the balcony of a theater looking upon a stage. The deep bay in the line of the bluffs where the camp was was not much larger than a stage, and beyond it, like a skilful back-drop, the wide, treacherous river glinted dimly while the sinister figures of the bandits moved about, and his father lay motionless and silent, face up to the sky.

Jim had crawled to that spot shaken and trembling, numb with the things he had already seen, sobbing for breath and wild. The further incredible horror he saw now and reeled from, had a curious effect on him. It sobered him, as a hard blow may sober a drunken man. Somehow it seemed to him now apart from himself; a calming detachment drove out the confusion and harrowing excitement.

Suddenly in place of the numbing, awful horror an icy anger welled up in him against the degenerate, loathsome things those men represented—against all the filth and brutality, the ignorance and superstition of a hundred generations that were conquering ruthlessly everything in the world superior to itself—anger because just blind brute physical force was on its side, while he who had race and brains and understanding looked on helpless, contemptible as some dumb animal.

Those men down there were not even fine and savage as wild beasts; their courage was far below a mountain lion's, for they were soaked with childish fear, with racial superstitions and cowardice. Slaves and cringing cowards they were before everything that their imperfect brains could not comprehend. While his kind, he himself, his father lying down there now in exquisite mental pain, represented the force of brains, of self-control, of the courage that had built all of civilization, had banished the old racial fears, had come out after thousands of years of growth into the light of reason and thought. They were the universe's most ignoble and ugliest thing, brute blind force—and they were about to win.

Inevitable, impressive as marching ranks, these thoughts trooped through Jim's consciousness, and suddenly he understood that the scene before him was even more than a terrible personal tragedy; it was the very crux of an age-old conflict—and he was not beaten yet. He still had a mind to fight with.

Like lightning his thoughts played over the awful situation before him. It was like a knotty problem. He tore it to pieces in his brain and searched every phase, as he would search in a laboratory, for the solution, for the utter defeat of the brute force against him.

A sound brain backed to the wall is the most dangerous thing in the world, the most invulnerable enemy, the most elusive and lightning-swift foe. A man squinting down a gun that can only spurt death till the cartridges are gone is nothing beside it.

It seemed an eternity of damnation to Jim, but before he had torn that scene to pieces for one minute he got his idea. He got it perfectly clear and whole, and it caused him not one instant's hesitation to think that if it failed he, too, was done for, side by side with his father, in the same way.

It would not fail. Steeped in the most degraded deviltry man can know, taut with fiendish excitement, the brutes below him would find themselves powerless before the weapon he could wield. Sliding back from the windlass, he sprang away in a harder run than he had ever achieved in his life.

A HALF-MILE from their camp and still wild with headlong flight, one bunch of Gonzales' men ran full into and were promptly shot down by Jennings' party as they rode swiftly up the river road which it had seemed best to them to follow in coming after Pete Horner. Some others of the bandits got away no doubt, though two were found drowned in the river and several of the scattered band were later taken.

Greaser Gonzales himself was hanged without ever understanding the thing that had crazed his black primitive mind with fear. The cowpunchers picked him up from the bushes where he was cringing and moaning innumerable prayers while, for the moment oblivious to him, Jim sat by the water's edge with his father's white but unmarred face in his lap, washing the grime from it.

Both were behaving in a manner that made Henry blush for his hard-boiled boss' hard-boiled reputation.

So much as he knew, however, Greaser Gonzales could not stop moaning about, and it still seemed to worry him more than the rope when they gave him his due some hours later. It appeared that Greaser's own strange and hideous god of vengence had struck him low at the very moment of his blood-boiling crime. Just when he was drawing the incandescent branding-iron from the coals a piercing scream from one of the men had rent the night, and, looking upward, Greaser had been destroyed.

For in demoniacal relief against the dark bluff as against a sable curtain, and descending straight upon him, the bandit chief had seen a creature all of living, cold, green light, a form clothed only in its own quivering, diabolical radiance; and even as he had gazed, this impossible presence, this burning being slid ever nearer to him, slowly and inexorably, dangling from his awful hand a thing of infernal fire, a ghostly, shining counterpart of the knife that Greaser Gonzales himself with his so practised thrust had plunged conclusively deep into Tom Crowley's heart.

The Honor of a King

by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

A Complete Novelette

Author of "Judgment By Steel," "The King's Choice," etc.

"BID them leave their weapons at the door!"

"They are unarmed, O king."

"Then they come in peace, and are welcome. Show them honor!"

Sigurd of the Sword-Danes, Keeper of the Door, turned to obey; and Hnaf the king bent anxious eyes upon his followers.

"Say naught to offend them," he ordered. "They have sworn to keep peace with us; but these outland Jutes are men without honor, quick to take offense—and they are jealous of us. They deem it unjust that Finn the Folk-Ruler gives more presents to us, his guests, than to them, his followers."

He stopped abruptly as the door opened to admit his visitors.

It was the year 446, when all the folk of the North were growing restless in their crowded homes. The Danes, under their great king Halfdan, were very powerful, but feared the expanding empire of the Swedes; Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, having spied out the fairness of Britain, were grinding swords and building keels; and Finn the Folk-Ruler, mighty monarch of the Frisians, had not only spread his power from Zuyder Zee to Ems, but even reached out into Slesvik and the northern isles. Only the little confederacy of the South-Danes, under their petty king Hnaf, neither feared nor envied any other folk. They were prosperous and safe; their ruler's skill in war, his loyalty to his great suzerain Halfdan, and his sister's marriage to Finn the Folk-Ruler, assured them wealth and protection. Thus they had felt free to cross the water to the Frisian capital, to join in the coming-of-age festival of Finnlaf, son to Finn, and Hnaf's nephew.

Their arrival had been greeted with rejoicing; much gold and silver had been heaped upon them. Too much; for the Outland Jutes who served as mercenaries in the Frisian ranks—outlaws without a country or a king of their own—were beginning to mutter at Finn's preference for his South-Danish guests.

But the two Jutes who entered with the Keeper of the Door showed no hostility. They were big, lithe men, with merry faces; and Hnaf's brow cleared as he recognized them. Rising from his high seat in the middle of one long side of the hall, he strode with outstretched hand to greet his visitors.

"Hail, Wulf, war-chief of the Jutes!" he cried. "Glad are we to pour ale for so great a warrior! Take the seat of honor at my side, and bid your companion sit at the upper end of the bench nearest us. Ho, Auha! Drink for our guests!"

Wulf the Jute laughed joyously as he tossed off the heady ale, and thrust out the gold-wrought horn for more.

"You are the prince of givers, Hnaf!" he answered. "The night being cold, you offer me warmed drink! Such ale King Finn does not brew. Nay, let me not sit beside you, for you are a king, and I but a soldier of no birth. I will bide here, by my captain Wigstan."

And despite Hnaf's urgings he insisted on taking his place at the end of the bench that ran along the north wall of the gabled building.

Anxious to please the Jutish chiefs—and so to end the ill-concealed malice which their followers bore the South-Danes—Hnaf stationed no less a champion than Hengist the Hammerer behind them, with orders to keep their horns full; and crying for more meat, he saw to it that their hands and mouths were kept busy with well-roasted tidbits. Wulf and Wigstan needed no urging, but fell to like men famished.

Yet they managed to convey a subtle insult to their hosts, by giving neither thanks nor notice to the man who poured their wine. Hengist the Hammerer, son of Hnaf's younger sister as the Frisian prince Finnlaf was son of the elder, was famous for his courage through all the North, and a prince to boot; yet the two Jutes showed no sense of the honor conferred on them by his services. Hengist flushed hotly, but set down their offense to ignorance.

Once more in his seat of authority, Hnaf steered the talk into what he deemed safe channels. If he could make friends of these men, he and his hundred followers might yet bring their visit—which must last the Winter through, for the Frisian harbors would soon be ice-bound—to a safe end. Otherwise the rancor of the Jutes must soon break out in quarrels, blood would flow, and Finn would face the perilous task of judging between his Danish kinsfolk by marriage and the fierce mercenaries whose valor had often brought him victory.

" 'Twill be a great feast tomorrow," Hnaf began. "My nephew Finnlaf is a warrior already, for all his youth. Did he not slay two full-armed Franks ten days ago, no man helping him? And so near his coming of age—a good omen!"

Wulf the Jute paused in his eating, a half-gnawed beef-bone in his great fist.

"A warrior indeed!" he assented. "Worthy of his blood—both of his father's and his mother's. All men know that you South-Danes are good folk to take wives from!"

"We were much honored when the great King of the Frisians married my sister," Hnaf returned the compliment. "Truly he is fortunate above all rulers, with so wide a realm, so strong a son, and the bravest men of the North to fight for him!"

Wulf washed down the last of his meat, and cast a glance at his companion. "Aye, we are valiant," he boasted complacently. "I have slain two and twenty men with my own hand, and Wigstan here has slain fifteen. Not a man of the eight-score who follow me but has offered at the least four dead foes to Odin!"

Sigurd, he who kept the door, was a wise man; but he recognized this as a taunt, and could not resist making answer. He was himself a prince in a small way. He drew his magnificent body up to its full height.

"We, too, are not without fame," he retorted. "Men say that I have destroyed more enemies than any other man that ever left Danish soil!"

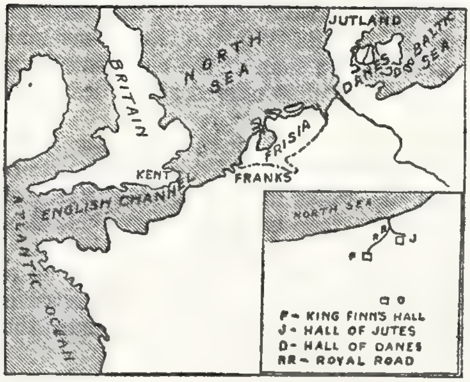
Hnaf's house-carles burst into guttural shouts of applause. Sigurd, chief of the clan of the Sword-Danes, was indeed a mighty champion, whom his countrymen would gladly back against any Jute that ever drew a mercenary's pay.

But Hnaf was not pleased; he knew that boasting, once well launched, would lead to angry glances, perhaps to blows. His two guests, having come unarmed, trusted to him for protection from insult. The hall was hot with the fire that roared in the great central hearth, and the ale mounted rapidly to his men's heads.

"We are glad," he said politely, "to entertain such mighty heroes, whose brave deeds teach us how to bear ourselves." Yet even as he spoke, his eyes intercepted a glance that flashed from Wulf to Wigstan; and he was certain it boded no friendliness. He was disturbed that the two Jutes did not remove their coats of mail. Etiquette forbade his suggesting it, though the guests must be sweltering in all that heat. But that they did not doff their armor of their own accord was almost an insult—it hinted that they did not trust their hosts. If so, what was the purpose of their visit? To spy out the Danes' dispositions for defense of the hall which King Finn had assigned them?

"Aye, mighty we are," Wulf proclaimed loudly. "Mightier and braver than all other men!"

This was too much, making all allowance for the ale he had drunk. It is one of the seven deeds of shame to boast one's self better in any way than one's host. Every man was entitled to boast at table; it was a duty he owed his self-respect; but there were well-defined limits, and the Jutish war-chief had exceeded them.



Hnaf turned purple, but clapped his hands in polite applause. He wanted no trouble. He and his five-score men were alone in a foreign land. The hall his royal brother-in-law had given them for their lodging was three miles from the royal hall itself, and four from the quarters of the Jutes whom Finn used for shock troops; for the Frisian king held that the best way of avoiding quarrels between the three people was to keep them apart except when they were in his own presence. But this very isolation from Finn's court exposed the South-Danes to assault, if the Jutes should dare break the king's peace. Yet Hnaf scarcely thought they would. To do so meant to incur the wrath of the mighty Finn, whose arm was so long and so heavy that all men called him "Folk-Ruler."

But if Hnaf forebore to rebuke his guests, there was one whose hot blood could not brook their insolence. Hengist, noblest of all the South-Danes save Hnaf alone, bent over Wulf's shoulder and flung an answer into his very ear.

"Strong and brave as ye are," he cried, his young face bright with anger, "there sits one braver and better than any kingless Jute that ever took a foreigner's wages!"

He pointed to his uncle, Hnaf.

Now to remind a man who has left his own country to serve a king of another land that he fights for wages is scant courtesy. Wulf, nudging his companion, rose, a black scowl on his face.

"Come, Wigstan!" he commanded. "We are unwelcome here!"

Hnaf hastened forward to appease them, but they paid no heed to his outstretched hand. The Danes had not applauded Hengist's outburst, for they sensed its danger, and winced at its bad manners. But as the Jutes edged toward the door there was none but Hnaf to bid them stay.

Wulf flung open the door, which was guarded without by a single champion, Hunlaf the Strong. There being no apparent need for vigilance, Hunlaf sat on the bench by the threshold, his face hidden by a tilted flagon. Wigstan, who had drunk—or seemed to have drunk—too much, stumbled over Hunlaf's feet. The Jute glared savagely; and when Hunlaf did not excuse himself, Wigstan cried roughly—

"Out of my way, dog, eater of offal!"

With a howl of rage the Dane sprang to his feet, and swung a brawny fist. Wigstan, with a dexterity that belied his seeming drunkenness, swerved from the blow, snatched a broad knife from under his mail tunic, and plunged the blade deep in his opponent's throat.

"Treachery!" roared the Danes, all leaping up. "They bear weapons!"

Their eyes aflame with malice, the two Jutes stood by the open door. The Danes were taken by surprize. No guest was supposed to bear arms in the hall of his host; and these two had said they were weaponless. To show their own good faith, the Danes had hung their arms high on pegs along the walls. Now, while those nearest the door ran forward to prevent the Jutes from escaping, others sprang for the pegs and clutched at sword and spear.

Wigstan's knife dripped blood across the threshold; Wulf now bore a second gleaming blade.

It came, the first Danes to reach them being weaponless, but mad with anger. Wulf grunted an order—the two knives flashed. Wulf's struck a Danish house-carle between the neck-cords; Wigstan's caught on his adversary's cloak and scarce drew blood. Before Wigstan could strike again, sinewy fingers closed on his throat and tore the life from him.

Snarling like a beast, Wulf hurled his knife at Hnaf's head, and sprang out into the cold darkness. A javelin swished after him, passing over his head. Behind him roared the pursuit, a dozen lean-limbed soldiers, some armed, some trusting to their thews. But there was no moon yet, and the ground was black with frost. When the house-carles returned, they came not empty-handed; yet they bore no captive with them.

Wulf's knife still stuck in the wall, where it had sunk deep after missing Hnaf's head. The king wrenched it from the wood, and held it up for all to see. The blade was full twelve inches long, very broad, and double-edged.

"Such a tool no man carries to carve his meat," he spoke ominously. "I should rebuke you, my nephew, for bringing this upon us, were it not clear that our foes meditated treachery from the first. Else they had not brought these—or had given them up to the guard at the garth-gate."

He broke off, aware that those who had returned from vain pursuit were watching him with bloodthirsty eyes.

"What now, Auha?" he questioned.

"The guard at the gate of the palisade," Auha answered. "Four good men—all slain, their weapons gone!"

"Man the gate, and the loopholes!" Hnaf cried swiftly. "Out bows and shafts! Don your mail!"

Every man who was not already full-armed snatched at his weapons. Arrow-chests were flung open, bows and arrows served out. The hides covering the loopholes in the wall were cast aside, letting the cold air in. Before each loophole stood an archer, a second waiting in reserve, supported by a spearman.

The chiefs grouped about Hnaf, receiving orders. Three-score men, captained by Sigurd, Auha, and Hnaf himself, then rushed into the palisaded courtyard, buckling their mail and clapping on their helmets as they ran. The bodies of the slain guards were dragged in, and the great gate barred.

"This night may my nephew Hengist fight as bravely as he speaks!" muttered Hnaf, bending over the dead guards. "He has always borne himself well, nor is he too young to command the inner defense. But I would not have him out here—he is too rash. Ha!"

He had turned over the corpse of one of the slain, and saw that the throat was cut from ear to ear. The other three had been served in likewise.

"From behind!" the king observed, "and with such knives as Wulf and Wigstan—But this is the work of more than two men! Others crept up in the dark, while we entertained their chiefs. And if so, then they have a host in hiding out yonder!"

He pointed to the wide, dark plain, where an army might have lurked unseen, so it kept far enough away for the jingle of its mail to pass unheard.

"Sigurd!" the king cried. "Auha! Come hither!"

As the two chiefs hurried up, he explained his thoughts.

"This is a well-contrived plot. Doubtless all Finn's Jutish mercenaries are skulking yonder. This being the night before the great feast, they have been given leave, and think to use it to destroy us. When we are dead, they will go before King Finn and lay complaint against us, saying that we forced a quarrel on them. There is but one way to outwit their cunning—dispatch messengers to the king to tell him the truth!"

"How shall messengers win past their lines, if they indeed be there?" asked Auha, peering into the night.

"Even as Wulf escaped us—under cover of the dark. Send two men out, without armor to betray them with its noise, armed only with short swords. It is our only hope. We can hold off great odds till Finn comes with his Frisians; but if the Jutes deceive him with a false tale, he will be bitter against us for breaking the peace. My brother-in-law is a just man, but stern. We must get word to him first!"

Two men came forward, swift runners. Their mail cast off, they stood before Hnaf in their short cloaks, and received their orders.

"If ye are caught, ye perish!" Hnaf warned them. "Win through at all cost, and I will cover your arms with gold!"

The gate was opened as softly as might be, and the runners vanished into the dark. Quietly the bars were dropped behind them again.

For every twelfth post in the palisade there was a loophole at the height of a man's neck, made by gouging out half the width of each post where two joined; and—lacking enough archers to post at each—Hnaf set a bowman at every other loophole. The alternate holes were guarded by spearmen with eight-foot shafts. These dispositions took half his outer garrison; twelve of those remaining he told off to hold the gate, and held eighteen in reserve. All save the bowmen were armed with round shield, spear, and either sword or ax. Hnaf himself stood in the open space between hall and palisade, where he could direct the main fighting.

His little force marshaled, the king waited; and all held silence, straining their ears for the tramp of feet and the clang of shield on mailed back. For perhaps the quarter of an hour no sound arose, save the eager breathing of the Danes; then, afar off, the pounding of a horse's hoofs smote the earth; steel clashed; and cleaving the night as a sword cleaves flesh, a voice cried, deep and resonant—

"On guard, Danes!"

The distant clash of steel again; then, as swiftly stopped, there pealed out a vast shout of triumph—the war-cry of the outland Jutes.

"They have caught our runners—ran them down with horses!" cried Hnaf. "It was Ragnvald's voice that bade us be on guard. Stand to your arms, lads! If we survive their rush, we have still to reckon with King Finn, who, having only their tale to judge us by, will hold us the aggressors."

A distant tramping shook the plain—the march of eight-score mailed men. Their iron-bound shields clanked against their steel-clad shoulders; their wooden scabbards rattled at their sides. As they came steadily on, eating up the distance in long strides, one sang in their ranks—the measured chanting of an ancient war song.

Then the moon came out with a rush, sailing through a bank of black cloud; and it was as if a hundred torches had flamed at once.

Quickly Hnaf called to him two warriors.

"Lay down your weapons," he commanded, "all save your mail and shields. Climb the roof, and there cover yourselves as best ye may. But watch well, and if any brands are flung up on the thatch, cast them down again. I had thought it would rain."

Swiftly the two mounted the outer stair to the loft, swung to the eaves, and scaled the slanting roof, where they lay out along the ridge-pole, each holding his shield so as to guard head and back against arrows.

Hengist, within the hall, had taken such means as he could to support the outer garrison. His own force would be safe until the palisade should be carried—or till a lucky cast with glowing torch or fire-arrow should set the hall in flames. It was fire rather than direct assault that the besieged feared.

Hengist had sent half his men to the loft, whence small windows, each a foot square, gave on all four sides of the court, six of them commanding the gate, with a clear sweep over the palisade. Of his remaining twenty, ten stood at the north door of the hall, ten at the south, waiting to re-enforce or to cover the retreat of Hnaf's men.

Now the advancing Jutes were spied by the two on the roof, and their cry of alarm was mocked by the shout of the assailants. Their armor flashing in the moonlight, the Jutes offered a perfect target for the shafts of the besieged; yet no arrow was loosed. Not till the hostile column—marching eight abreast—was within javelin-flight were they challenged from the gate; and at the first shout they halted.

"Why come ye hither with spears by night?" called Hnaf; and the rough voice of Wulf made answer:

"For the blood of Danes! Sing your death-songs to Odin; for there shall be no peace between you and us till the ravens have picked your bones!"

"How shall ye answer to Finn for the murder of his kinsmen?"

The Jutish war-chief laughed in full-throated scorn.

"When ye are dead ye cannot bear witness against us!" he scoffed. "Nor will your two messengers accuse us—they have gone to bid the gods prepare a place for you. Make ready, all!"

At his order, the Jutish ranks divided into two columns of four. Down the lane between them advanced a dozen men bearing a stout log at a shambling trot.

"Loose!" cried Hnaf. His veteran bowmen at the loopholes flanking the gate drove their shafts at short range into the breasts of those who bore the battering ram. Released by their fall, the log crashed down across their bodies.

At the same moment, as others sprang to pick up the log, Hengist's archers poured in a volley from the loft-windows. With a cry of consternation—for they had not faced Danes before, and knew not that people's skill in war—the foremost ranks fell back.

"To the work, ye dogs!" roared Wulf. "Will ye cringe before half your number? Once more!"

To hearten them, he himself seized the nearer end of the log; and quickly his bravest warriors ranged behind him. Back of them the two columns waited, ready to pour through the gate as soon as a breach should be made.

Once more the Danish archers loosed. Two of the log-bearers dropped; but the three shafts which reached Wulf rebounded harmlessly from his mail. He laughed again. Under his ring-armor he wore a breast-piece of plate captured from the River-Franks, proof against arrows.

Now the Danes were shooting no longer in volleys, but each man for himself, as fast as they could notch and pull. Hnaf did not need to direct them, for they were experienced soldiers all, trained to their trade from boyhood. One by one they picked off those who bore the log, only Wulf escaping. But as fast as the Jutes fell, others took their places, till they came so close to the gate that the Danish archers had to expose their heads and bow-arms perilously through the loopholes to reach them. For this the Jutes were waiting, and their javelins flashed silver in the moonlight. Two of the Danes were pinned to the posts, and had to be pulled away, mangled, before others could replace them.

Now Wulf, bearing the near end of the log, was within stroke of the gate.

"Thrust!" he cried, and swung on the timber.

In that moment Sigurd, Keeper of the Door, shoved an archer aside and, peering through the loopholes, marked Wulf's position. His long spear shot out, not for the impenetrable breastplate, but for the right hand that clutched the log. The light was deceptive, so that the spear-point but bruised the hand; but Wulf's fingers, already stiff with cold, relaxed. Wulf dropped his end, just as the man behind him fell with an arrow through the throat. Dismayed, the Jutes gave way, the heavy log crashing to the earth.

Before they could renew the assault, Hengist's men in the loft brought a rain of shafts to bear on the heads of the two columns. A dozen men dropped; and now the Jutes ran back in fear, for they had lost in all twenty-six men—almost a sixth of their total strength. Well out of arrow-flight they shrank, Wulf cursing them and ordering them to stand fast.

But they were not beaten. They were no conscripts, enrolled from unwilling peasants; most of them were of good blood, and all were famous champions. Only annihilation could conquer their blood-lust. Once out of range they re-formed in two bodies, each in column of four. From each body six archers were told off—there were but a dozen bowmen all told; for none but Danes, in that age, were bowmen by trade and training. Under cover of this handful of archers Wulf ordered his first column forward, the second following at an interval of twenty paces. They came on slowly, shield-rim lapping shield-rim to protect their front. Protected by their ranks, the archers kept pace with their advance, halting at eighty yards to pour their arrows against the loopholes of the palisade.

"Now for it!" cried Hnaf. "They will assail the gate with axes. Run, Arnulf, and bid my nephew direct his shafts against their column. Do ye at the loopholes smother their archers. Loose!"

Then began a contest of archery, while between and under the hissing arrows the advancing host rolled on. Paying no attention to the phalanx, Hnaf's bowmen shot over their heads against Wulf's, who did their best to keep the loopholes covered. But the eight-inch apertures proved a smaller target than a man's body; and the Jutes, who had never esteemed the bowman's trade, were poor marksmen. Scattered though they were, they suffered so heavily that they were forced to retreat out of range.

Their volleys lasted, however, till the first column reached the gate. That it did reach its objective proved the Jutish valor, for the hot hail of shafts that beat upon them from the loft tore great gaps in their ranks. As fast as the shield-wall was breached, however, it closed again, shield lapping shield as before.

Now the first rank was close to the gate, protected by the palisade from the bowmen in the loft, and by their shields from those at the loopholes. The second and third ranks deployed, to thrust their spears at the loopholes, and so prevent the defense from harassing those who beat upon the gate. The oaken planks—each a handbreadth thick—quivered beneath the onslaught of axes.

Since the posts of the palisade rendered their shafts of no avail against the head of the column, Hengist's men kept a stinging storm of arrows beating against the Jutish rear and mainguard, at so short a range that the barbs bit through mail and flesh. The column swayed under its punishment, but held its ground. Deploying would have saved many lives, but would have weakened their final rush when the time should come; wherefore, in the teeth of Hengist's volleys, they held their own like men.

The narrow ax-blades were now biting through the planks.

"Form, all!" roared Hnaf. "Down spears!"

From the loopholes rushed the useless archers, casting aside bows and quivers, catching up their broad-headed pikes where these leaned against the posts; and all the outer garrison formed in a dense half-moon about their king. Like the Jutes, they too lapped shields, with their spear-points clutched in their right hands, and the points menacing above the shield-rims.

There was no way, now, to prevent the breach of the gate, for the Jutes covered the loopholes, and the axes of their front rank were tearing great holes in the timbers. At last Wulf's ax-head dashed down a weakened plank; his left arm reached in to pluck at the bar, and a cluster of points lunged inward through the breach.

Hnaf's spear struck like a snake, pinning Wulf's hand to the timbers; but not before the bar was freed from its sockets. Before any of the Danes could jam it back, the whole Jutish first column threw itself forward, and the gate burst open. Thrown forward against his wounded arm by the rush of his own men, Wulf found himself freed by the tearing loose of his speared hand. Staggering a moment, he hurled his ax full in the face of a Dane, recovered his balance, and drew sword.

The first onslaught of the column rolled up against the Danish spears; but as those in the rear surged up through the entrance, their weight forced the Danes to drop their shafts and flail out with sword and ax. The moment's loss of time, as they reached for their hand-weapons, cost them several men. But in the forefront were the most skilful warriors, Sigurd the Doorkeeper, famed throughout the North; Auha of the Red Sword; Guthlaf and Oslaf, and Hnaf himself, backed by veterans of a score of stricken fields.

"To the hall!" cried Hnaf. "By fours, to the rear!"

It was the only hope, for now the second Jutish column reenforced the first, and a steady torrent of men jammed the Danish circle back, widening it, threatening to break through. On the flanks the Danes drew more blood than in the center, for they took the onrushing Jutes in the sides; but the Danish flanks were thinner than the inner arc. It was but a question of time before they must break before superior weight; hence it was that Hnaf ordered the rearmost to fall back on the hall.

A desperate fight ensued to hold the gate till the bulk of the Danish force should reach the hall doors. Their formation permitted the withdrawal of many men without presenting fewer points to the foe; for the rearmost Danes could not reach the Jutes, and lent only weight to the defense. But weight Hnaf's men needed, being outnumbered at best; and it was only by the terrible exertions of the great champions among them that the circle held.

As each four men withdrew, they dashed for the hall, and there formed at each of the two doors, in the east and west walls. Here they were strengthened by most of Hengist's men, pouring down from the loft to help hold the entrances. Hengist himself, with the best of his champions, hastened to the gate to prolong the stand there. For perhaps five minutes they were welcome; but by that time the bulk of the garrison was in the hall.

When only twenty men were left to hold off the assault, Hnaf gave word to abandon the gate. With a final desperate rally they struck down seven of the foremost Jutes, and fled like deer before the assailants could recover from their brief confusion.

Wulf, his left hand torn and dripping blood, his right clutching his sword, leaped over the slain and led the pursuit. The first of his spearmen hurled their weapons, striking down two Danes; then, like a river in spate, they poured through the court after their foes.

For this Hengist had been waiting. Withdrawing a little ahead of the general flight, he had given orders to his bowmen at the loopholes in the hall. The gate being in the north wall, and the outer garrison having sped for the east door of the building, the pursuit had to traverse half of the north and east walls. As they passed the loopholes, withering volleys tore their unshielded right sides, dropping half a score. Pursuit was slowed just enough for the last of the Danes to reach shelter and bar the door.

ONCE within the palisade, the Jutes were once more exposed to arrows from the loft. Hnaf had now taken command over the entire Danish force, and sent eighteen bowmen to man the loopholes above stairs. All told, thirty bows were drumming their shafts into the Jutes at close range, where neither shields nor armor were adequate defense.

Fuming with wrath, Wulf saw his advantage in numbers dwindle. The range was so short, and the archers in the loft so secure from attack, that his men were dropping in clusters. Again and again his axmen thundered at the two entrances; but the stout doors held. Roaring in rage, Wulf raised his own ax and hurled himself at the east door. His strokes sheared through the heavy boards, for all he had but one good hand. Not for nothing was Wulf known as a champion of champions.

"Waldhere and Sigehere, to me!" he cried; and two stalwart chiefs ran up to add their strokes to his own.

In succession they struck, each on or just beneath the spot where the others' strokes had weakened the planking.

"The door yields!" cried Hnaf. "Stand fast!"

"The west door is gone!" Auha reported. "Sigurd holds it with ten men."

"Take him ten more. Hengist and I hold this door with twenty. Call down the bowmen!"

Wulfhere, brother of Wulf, had beaten in the west door. He was about to rush in at the head of his men, when he became aware of a giant blocking the entrance, shield up, great sword raised to strike. The doorway was so narrow that only one man, with his weapons, could break through at a time; a mass rush could not help, for the door-sill was raised a foot above the ground, and would break their onslaught. Behind the giant stood a ring of men with lowered spear-points.

Wulfhere, with the instinct of the duellist, challenged the giant—

"Who art thou that holdest the door?"

His eyes burning into his foe's, the giant answered in a boasting chant:

"I am Sigurd the Doorward, Prince of the Sword-Danes, a champion widely known. If thou lovest thy young life, avoid me; otherwise enter, and taste the death in my sword!"

"I enter!" bellowed Wulfhere.

He set one foot on the door-sill, his point seeking an opening; and quicker than lightning fell the blade of Sigurd. His leg severed at the knee, Wulfhere fell in the arms of his followers. In silence Sigurd awaited the onrush that must follow.

A moment the Jutes held back, staring in consternation at the fall of their mighty officer. Then one sprang, for he had seen Sigurd step back, and knew not that it had been only to give Auha, Sigurd's companion, the honor of the next blow. As the Jute leaped into the hall, Auha's ax clove him to the brain. Then, side by side, the two champions waited; nor was there any Jute that lusted to be first to meet them.

At the east door the huge-limbed Hnaf and his fiery nephew held their posts well. Four men fell before them, Wulf himself reeling back under Hnaf's ax. But Wulf was not slain—the stroke had been turned by his ridged helmet. He came on again. Shield he had none, for his torn hand could not bear to grip the thongs; but he feared no man while he could hold weapon. His mighty leap bore Hnaf back and cleared the step. Hnaf stumbled under his impact, but contrived to jab his shortened ax-haft into Wulf's bearded lips; and as the Jute's head jerked backward, Hnaf, shifting his grip, brought his blade down. The mighty ax sliced through Wulf's mail just to one side of his plate corselet, severed the shoulder-muscles, and tore off his right arm.

The Jutes had enough of direct assault. To win inside the hall, where they would have some chance of victory, they must pass the defenders of the doors; and these, protected by the door-posts no less than by their shields, blocked the way so securely that none could pass. Aided by the high thresholds, the two champions at each door—the best men in the north at close combat—could hold their stations against a thousand.

Though the Jutes had lost their leaders, they still had champions of their own. Sigehere, a man of huge frame and much shrewdness, took command.

"Back three paces!" he ordered. "Present points! Now, though we can not come in, they can not get out. Fire the house!"

Had he not been so desperate, Sigehere would not have fallen back on the weapon of fire. Like Wulf, a lover of hand-to-hand fights, he scorned to burn out his enemies. Moreover, while it was still dark, the flames might be seen from the Frisian court, and Finn would then send messengers to learn its cause. But, though the moon was still bright, dawn was not far off; and with dawn would come Finn's heralds in any case. The Jutes must slay all their enemies before then, or their guilt would be plain; and now that numbers were even, it would be hard for them to win. The advantage even lay with the Danes, who had lost ten men but none of their officers.

"Fire the gables!" Sigehere repeated. "We must finish them!"

His men obeyed promptly. A dozen struck steel on flint, caught the sparks on the shredded ends of bark scrolls, and bound these to the points of javelins. They must make each shaft count, for they had been unable to take many of the heavy throwing-spears with them, since their march, to accomplish its purpose before Finn could learn of it, had necessarily been light. While the main Jutish force, in two companies at either door, besieged the entrances with the points of their long pikes, the twelve flame-bearers ran swiftly about the court, seeking the best places in the straw-thatched roof to lodge their fire-darts.

This was what Hnaf had most feared—what he had in mind when he divided his own forces between the two doors. His booming voice called up his archers, and set them to shooting at those who sought to kindle the thatch, while he and Sigurd marshaled their men for a sally.

The Danish bowmen notched their shafts and loosed with careful aim, for on their success depended the fate of all. One by one they shot down the dodging, leaping Jutes even as these poised their javelins; but not before five fire-shafts had lodged in the bone-dry straw. Well had they placed their flaming weapons—low down by the eaves, yet high enough to be out of reach from the loft loopholes. On both sides of the roof crackling fires hissed and sputtered.

The two Danes who had been lying flat along the ridge-pole, sheltered by their shields, now hastened to their duty. But first they cast down their shields, for they must climb down the steep slope of the roof, and needed both hands free. One on each side, they crawled down as swiftly as safety permitted, plucked out the javelins, and beat at the flames with their hands. So far they had been safe from weapons; but now, as they crouched just above the eaves, their heads and shoulders outlined against the glow of the little fires and the moonlight, the Jutes set up a savage view-halloo. Javelins hissed about their ears; long spears were upthrust toward their mailed sides.

But the very light which revealed them shone full in the eyes of their foes, so that the Jutes aimed badly; moreover, upcast weapons strike weakly, and the two Danes were mailed. Swiftly they extinguished four of the five fires; then one, struck in a weak spot in his armor, tumbled dying among the Jutes. The other, the work on his side of the roof done, climbed up to the ridge, worked his way down the other side, and down to the remaining blaze. A yell announced that he had been discovered; a throwing-knife rebounded from his helmet, dizzying him. But he clung fast to his hold; his right hand stole out toward the spreading flame. Finding the blaze too high to be beaten out with hands, he swiftly stripped off his cloak and set about to smother it. A spear poked up to finish him; and in that moment Hnaf led his sally, Sigurd covering the charge with a demonstration from the other door.

Out of the east door the king charged, shield up, ax poised; and on his heels, one at a time—for the narrow door forbade a charge in mass—poured eighteen warriors. Hengist remained behind to hold the retreat open.

The Danish onset crashed into the circle of Jutish spears; but the advantage now was with the besiegers. It was the Danes who must now come one by one, unable to form till they cleared the step. The Jutes bore in upon their spears like hunters about a boar-run in the forest. Lucky it was for the Danes that Hnaf led them. His shield thrust aside ten points at once; his ax fell thrice, tearing a breach in the Jutish shield-wall. Then Guthlaf and Oslaf were beside him, hewing savagely, while the on-rushing Danes grouped about them and strove to widen the breach enough to form in a compact wedge.

Respited by the sally, the warrior on the roof beat at the dying fire till it went out in stinking smoke. His yell of triumph told Hnaf that the purpose of the sally was effected.

Slowly, lashing out with sword and ax, the Danes retreated, Hnaf, Oslaf, and Guthlaf holding the rear. They had lost eight dead, and many of the rest were wounded. But they had broken the Jutish circle, bitten deep into the numbers of their foes, and saved the hall from burning. Step by step they made good their retreat, till all were within but the three chiefs, backed up against the doorway. Now these must turn to surmount the high threshold after their men. A second's carelessness, a moment's delay in the execution of their duty by those within the hall, and the Danes would lose their king and two of their stoutest champions.

But Hengist, young as he was, knew his duty well. A sudden storm of arrows flashed in the faces of the Jutes and hurled them back blinded. Seizing the instant, and covered by successive volleys, the Danish chiefs faced about and planted their feet on the threshold. Then the arrow-play ceased, to let them enter. One spring, and they were safe.

A joyful cry from the loft caught Hnaf's ear:

"The dawn! The dawn!"

It was true. From his post Hnaf could see the rim of the far horizon shot with gray. A howl of fury rose from the Jutes; sunrise would see Finn's messengers riding to bid the Danes to the morning's feast. And their task was unaccomplished; the Danes still lived, to lay complaint against Jutish treachery, and tell the true tale of the attack.

"Will the gables never burn?"

Sigehere's voice rose despairingly; but the question sent a thrill of fear to every Danish heart. He would not have spoken so if the fires in the thatch had been completely extinguished. A bowman, at the king's command, cast down his weapons and thrust his head through a loft window. A Jutish spear buzzed past his cheek, but not before he had peered down the whole rim of the eaves.

"I see nothing," he reported; and a second gave the same answer for the western side. But the fire—if there was one—might be high up the pitch of the roof, where they could not see it. Then a cry from the man on the roof confirmed their fears.

Yet the flame was not high up; it was at the very edge of the eaves. By some freak of fortune, the fifth of the fires, which the guard on the roof had smothered with such labor, had sent a tiny spark deep into the thatch and, unobserved, had burned under the surface. Slowly, without breaking into sight, it had crept round to the edge of the gable, where they who looked through the loopholes could not see it. Only from directly beneath, where the Jutes stood under the protection of the outer east wall, had it at last broken to the surface; and there Sigehere had seen it. It was now a race between the fire and the heralds of Finn. For some time—how long or short none could tell—it would not be dangerous enough to drive the defenders out.

The roof-guard strove valiantly to put out the flames. He crawled to the eaves, plucked at the thatch, and cast off three great handfuls before a Jutish javelin caught him in the throat. With a bubbling cry he pitched to the earth. All his valor had accomplished was to give the blaze air, and it burst out along the gable with a crackling roar.

"Stand fast!" Hnaf shouted. "We may yet hold out! See, the rim of the sun!"

JUST as the pale sun cast its first quivering beam on the flat plain, the drumming of hoofs caught their ears. It was Auha's shout that proclaimed the first sight of Finn's messengers, riding fast. But they were yet far off, and the fire was gaining. Wisps of smoke were seeping through the thatch. Soon fingers of flame would reach in and hook about the roof-beams.

The messengers galloped up in a lather of foam; their voices rising in shrill surprize at the scene before them. Auha's voice rang out:

"Treachery! Take word to Finn!"

Hnaf hastened to the western door. There, riding through the shamefaced Jutes, advanced five horsemen from the northern gate, led by none other than Prince Finnlaf. Even now, hot with battle and hopeful of rescue, Hnaf flushed with pride that Finn should have sent his own son to bid their kinsman welcome to the young prince's feast. It was a great honor, and a fitting recognition of the ties that united Hnaf the Dane with his Frisian friends.

"What means this?" cried Finnlaf. "Who caused this evil deed?"

Before a Dane could answer, Sigehere the Jute rushed up, and fell at Finnlaf's feet just as the prince dismounted.

"Treason, my lord!" he gasped. "Our war-chief, Wulf, and his kinsman Wigstan were the guests of these Danes last night. Basely Hnaf ordered his men to set upon them, as they sat at table, drunk with Danish beer. Wigstan was slain, being unarmed; and Wulf barely escaped to lead us on to vengeance for the wicked deed!"

"Is this true, my uncle?" Finnlaf questioned, his beardless lips tight with anger.

"By my honor, it is not!" the Dane retorted. "This dog lies! Wulf and Wig——"

He ceased suddenly, spread both arms wide, and reeled, a javelin protruding from his breast. From behind Finnlaf a Jute had cast it cunningly, to stop the perilous testimony by starting the fight anew. His crime succeeded; the furious Danes rushed from the hall to take revenge, and the Jutes pressed up to renew the battle. Spears flashed, arrows sang through the chill air.

Drawing his sword, Finnlaf thundered at them to cease. Hnaf, whose wound was not dangerous—his mail had almost turned the spear—staggered up, and cried on his Danes to leave off fighting. But the tragedy had gone too far; Danes and Jutes were locked in combat all over the court. Flames, now tearing through the thatch at a dozen points, played red on mail and blade; a thick smother of smoke, filling the enclosure, now hid, now revealed the groups of struggling warriors.

Snatching up his shield, Hnaf turned his back on his royal nephew, and, bleeding as he was, flung himself into the fight. Steel clashed on steel like the clangor of a hundred anvils. Close-gripped, choking in the hot smoke, Jute and Dane strove together with fury that mounted to madness.

Enraged that none would heed his commands, bent on stopping the fray at all costs, Finnlaf ordered his five companions to interfere as best they could, and himself rushed to the nearest combatants. He had no plan, no thought save to stop the fighting; and his inexperience lent him no wisdom. All he knew how to do was to use his hands.

He had not run ten paces before he crashed full into a knot of struggling men, hidden from him by the smoke. One he seized by the arm, and hauled him away with fierce young strength, belaboring the other with the flat of his sword, shouting commands the while:

"Leave off, ye fools! It is I, Finnlaf, who speak! Have done!"

He might as well have interfered between rival bears in the fighting madness. The struggling men did not so much as hear him. Snarling, they flung him aside, and closed again. An ill-aimed blow sent him reeling, half-stunned.

As soon as his wits gathered, he set about his purpose with unaltered determination. Come what might, he would end the slaughter; he would show that, young as he was, he could command men. He had lost sight of his five followers in the rising smoke-billows, but he thought not of them. A lift in the reek showed two men fighting—champions, by the vigor of their blows. Finnlaf hastened to them, and bade them cease.

Then Fate thrust her relentless hand into the struggle. One of the two champions launched a mighty back-stroke at the other's head. Full on the helmet it fell, an ax blow powerful enough to have cleft its victim to the breast. But in that instant the latter stumbled, so that the stroke smote him at an angle, glanced from his helmet, and on the rebound dashed into Finnlaf's face, laying his cheek open.

For an instant the young Frisian stood dazed; then, as his own hot blood trickled between his lips, he was seized with the fighting madness. Shouting his war-cry, he plunged his sword into the throat of the man who had unconsciously smitten him; nor did he note who the man was.

Wounded to the death, the other yet struck out once more—merely in the reflex of war-taut nerves; but the reflex was powerful in one of so mighty a frame. The dying man's ax struck Finnlaf between the eyes, and tore his brain in two. As he fell, the morning wind sprang up. Gathering force in its sweep across the wide plain, it swept the smoke afar in trailing, tattered clouds, and revealed to both sides the last scene in the grim tragedy. One of the Frisian messengers saw it first; and his horror-charged voice tore through the forged minds of the fighting warriors and made them pause. Yet they might not have understood, or heeded, had not the flames of the burning hall suddenly torn through the gables with such intense heat that they could no longer endure it. So, roused by the shout and the heat at once, they broke off fighting—and saw.

Over the stunned form of Sigehere the Jute lay the corpse of the Danish king, his throat torn open by a blade that, dyed in his blood, was clasped in the dead fingers of Finnlaf. And Hnaf's ax was buried in Finnlaf's skull.

A groan burst from the throats of Danes and Jutes alike, even as the five Frisians set up the death-lament. Here was a deed that wiped the rage from their hearts, leaving only horror behind. Slain by each other's hands, uncle and nephew—mother's brother and sister's son—lay dead together.

Among those peoples, no relationship, not even that of father and son, was so close, so sacred, as that between maternal uncle and nephew. Bound through life and unto death by this holiest of ties, these two had yet slain each other. Unwitting what they did, they had burst the most sacrosanct bond that men could conceive.

Even while giving back before the terrific heat, the hostile warriors wrung their hands and shuddered at the deed. Their hearts were turned to water, their sinews slackened. Only Hengist—like Finnlaf, nephew to the dead king of the South-Danes—could think coherently. Shielding his face with his cloak—his shield was too hot to hold—he ran in to rescue the bodies of the slain. Others, roused by his act, hastened to help him. Not till the two bodies—none moving to rescue the senseless Sigehere—had been dragged without the palisade, and the living also had taken refuge there, did Jute and Dane again confront one another.

Hengist spoke first.

"A frightful thing has been done between us!" he groaned. "With you lies all the guilt, ye dogs of Jutes, honorless ones! Now must this thing be told to King Finn, though the lives of all of us pay for it! My place is with my men. Do thou, Sigurd, ride to the Frisian king with these messengers, that he may know the truth!"

"We, too, shall send a messenger!" cried one of the Jutes. "Shall a false tale be told against us?"

"We ask but to tell the truth against you!" Hengist replied sternly. "Not one of you shall go!"

Now the Jutes began to cry out against him; but one of the Frisian messengers, an old, gray-bearded counsellor raised his voice:

"It is not fitting that the news be delayed while ye dispute," he reproved them. "Nor will Finn wish to hear one side alone; and if men go to him from both sides, then will his grief be marred by unseemly bickerings. It were best that we who are of his own people bear the tidings. Do ye wait here for the king's will; and do ye refrain from further evil. It will not be long before my king comes to deal with you!"

11

In silence the Frisians mounted; in silence the others watched them ride off, the old counsellor leading Finnlaf's riderless horse. Not till they were out of sight did any speak. At last Hengist turned to gaze at the burning hall; and even as he gazed, the roof fell in with a furious billowing of flame and sky-leaping sparks.

"All this the treason of the honorless Jutes has wrought!" he said solemnly. "The life of a man is too short to take revenge enough!"

The Jutes eyed him sullenly.

"If ye seek further vengeance," one shouted, "seek it now, before your courage cools!"

Without a word Hengist's men—for he was now heir to Hnaf's crown and lordship—ranked themselves about him. Having suffered far less in defense than the Jutes in attack, the Danes now numbered six and eighty men, counting the less severely wounded. Seventy-three of the Jutes responded when such officers as were left them—none of the chiefs having survived—marshaled them. The hostile hosts were soon drawn up facing each other, less than a spear's cast apart. Each watchfully eyed the other, the Danes thirsting to avenge their fallen King, the Jutes reflecting that it were better to go down before Danish steel than to wait for the vengeance Finn would take for his son's death. Who knew what tale the messengers would bring to him?

Yet, for all their hate, neither party cared to strike the first blow. It was not fear that withheld them—it was the shock of the awful deed that had been done between them—the mutual murder of uncle and nephew. Each side felt itself unclean in the sight of the gods—aye, even the Danes, though the fight had been forced on them. Once more it was Hengist who, after long pause, voiced the feelings of all his men.

"My hands must be washed clean with sacrifice to Odin, and my honor purged of the blood of kinsmen, before I seek vengeance," he declared. "Let us await the judgment of Finn the Folk-Ruler!"

The Jutes seemed to assent; yet they desired now to resume the fight and end it, one way or the other, before Finn should come up with an overwhelming force of Frisians. Knowing themselves guilty, feeling in their hearts that the king's son's blood was on their hands as much as on the dead Hnaf's, they wanted to give their overcharged feelings the relief of battle. In fighting they might, perchance, win a death easier than that Finn would inflict on them when he learned the truth.

For some time they gave their guilty minds to their wretched thoughts; then one of their officers spoke his mind.

"Let us make these Danes fight. Better die in hot blood than in cold!"

A chorus of shouts gave assent; but none raised a weapon. For the Danes stood still, seeming not to heed them—Hengist, in a low voice, having sent word down the line that none should stir a hand unless they were attacked. The Jutes threatened, without result. Their foes glared with furious eyes, but stirred not.

Desperate, the Jutes began to heap them with evil names, and many a Dane's fingers closed on his hilt. But Hengist was no longer the rash boy of the night before; almost he seemed to have inherited his uncle's prudence. With calming words he held his men in check, till the frenzied Jutes raised their spears. Then, since conflict seemed inevitable, Hengist ordered his archers to notch their shafts, and the others to lap shields. The Jutes leaped forward; but before they could close, they came to a disordered stop, glancing about in frightened confusion. The Danes, awaiting their onset, stood firm, expectant of some trick; but in a moment they too became aware of that which had dismayed their foes. In their rear, from the direction of Finn's hall, a score of horsemen were riding up at full gallop; and from the farther distance came the rumble of a mounted host.

"Finn! The king!" cried the trembling Jutes. "Back, lest he be angered!"

BUT the king was upon them before they could re-align their ranks, which were broken with their advance and its sudden check. Sweeping round the end of the Danish line, he rode at the head of his troop straight between the opposing ranks, his eyes, glowing like an eagle's, scanning all as he passed. He noted the straight, firm array of the Danes, the broken, shuffling Jutish ranks; saw, too, that the Danes met his eyes full and fair, while the Jutes stared sullenly at the ground. Then he had passed them, saying nothing, not pausing in his course.

To the gate of the palisade he rode, whose posts were even now smoldering in the fierce heat from the glowing embers of the hall. There he dismounted, where, in the long shadow of the gate-post, his son and Hnaf lay side by side in death. Dismounting heavily, the king knelt by the bodies, staring long, tearlessly, at each. Then, his face hard, he mounted, and rode back to the Danes and Jutes, who had not ceased to watch him. He reined in at the head of the two lines and between them, glancing with bitter eyes from one to the other.

His gaze rested at length on one of the Jutish officers, one Wulfhard, who bore the title of First Spear.

"Tell your tale!" he commanded; and Wulfhard spoke.

He repeated Sigehere's falsehood, accusing the Danes of violating hospitality by luring Wulf and Wigstan to their hall, and attacking them in their cups; saying that only by the favor of Odin had Wulf escaped to lead his troops to the attack, which was justified by the treachery of the Danes. But when he came to tell of Finnlaf's death, he dared not lie: for in the troop behind the king he saw the five messengers who had ridden out that dawning with the young prince.

When he had done, Wulfhard's eyes gleamed with triumph, for he deemed that Finn was predisposed to believe the Jutes, else he would not have called for their version first. From him Finn turned to Hengist.

"Speak, my kinsman!" he commanded; and Hengist told all that had happened, truly, concealing nothing.

As he ended, Finn surveyed the confronted warriors long and keenly. When he spoke, his strong old hand plucked at his gray beard.

"When I came up, ye were about to fight again. Who was to blame for that?"

"The Danes, my lord!" Wulfhard cried.

Finn thrust out at him a hand quivering with anger.

"Ye dare say that, and the truth plain for any man to see! When I came up, your ranks were uneven from the haste with which ye withdrew from your onrush, while the Danes stood unmoved, as men that wait attack! In this matter ye have lied, therefore I think ye lied in much that went before!"

He paused; then, with broken voice, he cried—

"Between you, ye have slain my son—my only son!"

"My uncle also is dead!" Hengist returned.

"Aye, your uncle, brother of my wife!" Finn answered. "Uncle and nephew have slain each other; ye Danes have lost your king, and I—my son! There has been enough bloodshed—shall more evil be done for a hatred without cause? What more would ye take from me, having robbed me of that which is dearest?"

Then his blue eyes grew bleak as the frost-hard plain; and he gave utterance to his will.

"It is clear that the Jutes forced this quarrel, in which my son and the king of the South-Danes perished. I would shed as little blood as may be; yet the guilty must be punished. Ye two, Jutes and Danes, shall lay aside this quarrel forever—do ye hear? When ye have given your pledge, then shall the Jutes draw lots to decide which of them shall bear punishment. For every nine white lots there shall be one black. They who draw the black shall be hanged forthwith. For them who are left, and for all the Danes, there shall be free pardon. Is it understood?"

The Jutes cried out in consternation, and some began to clash their weapons. But the plain was now shaking under the hoofs of five hundred Frisian horsemen, whose mail and spears glittered in the frosty light. Resistance there could not be.

The riders came on relentlessly, spread out, and drew a cordon about Jutes and Danes alike. Then, as Finn repeated his judgment to his troopers, they hailed it with deep shouts of approval. The king turned to the Danes.

"Having lost your king," he said, "and being unable to sail home while Winter lasts, ye must take service with me. Ye are true men, and glad will I be to have you as my guests and servants. You, Hengist, shall be next to me in the kingdom; you and your men shall have another hall as good as this ye have lost. I will in all things treat you well—ye shall have as much gold, as fine weapons, as much honor, as my Frisians. Swear to obey me faithfully, and I will do all that a king may to atone to you for your king's death. Do ye agree?"

All the Danes waited in silence for Hengist to speak. He was their leader now; he could pledge their lives, their service, their honor.

"I have an uncle to avenge," Hengist replied. "How can I promise to keep peace and yet preserve my honor?"

"I have a son to avenge," Finn retorted quietly, "yet I do not ask for Danish blood to appease his spirit."

Touched by the stricken king's greatness of heart—and himself, indeed, helpless to take any other course—Hengist strode forward, and touched Finn's sword in token of loyalty.

"I am your man," he pledged himself, "and my men are yours."

"Good!" the King answered. "Disarm these Jutes, cut lots, and build the gallows!"

II

HENGIST sat in the high seat of the hall Finn had given him, communing with his gods. The tall back of his oaken throne brought them very near him, for they were carven out of the very wood of it. Behind Hengist's right shoulder loomed the bearded head of Thor, god of strife and of vengeance; opposite Thor, on the left, smiled Frey, kindly lord of peace and plenty; in their midst and above them towered the torso of Odin, patron of princes, judge of feuds, wise father of the host of Heaven. Though the All-Father's thick oak body formed the central part of the chair-back, his head, shaggy and helmeted, bent forward a foot above Hengist's, ready to whisper counsel to him who sat in the throne of power. Of wisdom the god had a never-failing source, for on his shoulders were perched the images of his ravens, who croaked into his ear all the tidings of the world; and at his flanks fawned the two divine wolves, bearers of the news of battles and slayings. Their curved backs formed the arms of Hengist's throne: so that behind, above, and on both sides he was surrounded by the divine knowledge and the divine strength.

Great was his need of both; and often had he sought them. The long Winter that had passed since his compact with Finn had eaten deep into his spirit. Young as he was, his cheeks were furrowed, and his brow was lined with bitter care. Both he and Finn had kept their bargain well; naught but fair words had passed between them, and Hengist and his warriors were rich with Frisian gold. In Finn's wars against the Franks, the Danes had won great honor; but neither gold nor fame could ease the suffering in Hengist's heart. He slept little; and whenever his exhausted body won sleep, his troubled mind brought before him the vision of Hnaf, bloody and mutilated, crying out for vengeance.

Revenge was the warrior's first duty, the sacred obligation of a prince; yet Hnaf was dead, and Hengist, his sister's son, had failed to avenge him. This was the source of Hengist's trouble: it tortured him in every conscious moment of his life. He did not count it revenge that Finnlaf, the young Frisian prince who, all unwitting, had slain Hnaf, had himself fallen beneath Hnaf's blade. That was fate; it did not touch the heart of the matter. It was the Jutes who were to blame for Hnaf's slaughter, and for all that the Danes had suffered. And on the Jutes Hnaf had not been avenged. That Finn had hanged many of them availed Hengist nothing. That was punishment, not vengeance. A man must avenge his own—no other man can avenge for him. By sparing nine-tenths of the Jutes, by continuing to regard and reward them as his servants, Finn had virtually taken on himself the burden of their guilt. By preventing the Danes from renewing the feud, Finn, in the eyes of all Northern folk, had made himself, vicariously, Hnaf's slayer. And Hengist had pledged his men —Hnaf's men—to serve Finn. He had had no choice—but that did not mend matters. While the Jutes lived, the red spirit of Hnaf would haunt Hengist's bed nightly, unable to rest under his grave-mound, though the fire had turned his bones to ashes.

And Hengist could not make the Jutes pay without breaking his oath of service to Finn. That oath had been sworn by all that was most sacred; and Finn's nobility of soul made the obligations of the Danes to him still holier. If he had been a tyrant, the oath could have been broken with no loss of honor. But Finn was the most generous, the most just, the bravest of lords; wherefore their oath to him could not be broken without a treachery almost equal to that of the Jutes. If Hengist owed a sacred duty to Hnaf's ghost, he owed a sacred duty to the living Finn.

Hnaf, in whose personal service Hengist had been from his fifth year, had always fostered the spirit of honor in his nephew.

"Courage," he had often said, "all men have in some measure; it is honor and good faith that win the favor of the gods. Keep your word, if you would be esteemed a man!"

And now the counsel of the living Hnaf strove, in his nephew's mind, with the dead Hnaf's ghostly cries for vengeance. All the Winter it had been so, till Hengist's heart was well-nigh eaten out.

The firelight flickered on the wooden faces of the gods, so that they seemed to nod and whisper to him. Yet no counsel came from their oaken lips; their favor was turned from him.

The eastern door of the hall opened, letting in the pale sun of early Spring. Guthlaf and Oslaf entered, the fiercest of the Danish warriors. Brothers they were, deeply attached to each other; there had been a third brother, Hunlaf; but he had fallen beneath Wigstan's knife just before the Jutish assault four months before. He had left a grown son, a strong young man and a brave soldier. This son had a name of his own, but none mentioned it. In their hot desire to avenge their brother, Guthlaf and Oslaf kept the flame of their wrath alive by calling the boy only "Son of Hunlaf," and all the Danes followed their example. He was thus a living reminder of the unappeased ghosts of the Danish slain.

Hengist looked up, with no welcome in his eyes for these, his bravest officers. The trouble in his breast had been kept alive by their promptings; they would not let him forget that his uncle's blood cried from the ground in vain. Nor could he bid them be silent, for they were graybeards, and a young man, whether prince or peasant, must yield reverence to his elders.

Straight to the dais they strode, their eyes gleaming with their bloody thoughts.

"It is Spring," Guthlaf began; and "The harbor is clear of ice," said Oslaf.

Hengist nodded gloomily.

"One might sail to Denmark now," added Guthlaf; and in his turn his brother spoke again:

"Today came three ships from Jutland,

bearing five hundred more Jutes to take service with Finn. Finn bade them swear to keep peace with us."

"All this I know," Hengist answered. "What is it to me?"

"Hnaf is dead," Guthlaf rebuked him.

"By Odin, that too I know!" cried the harassed prince. "Is there an hour, a moment, that I do not think on it? Give me peace!"

"Our men yearn for home," Oslaf took up the tale. "Most of them have left wives and children behind, whom they long to embrace once more. They think ever of the fair shores of Denmark, of the sea-girt islands and the green plains, of their friends and dear ones, and—of the shame and dishonor that clings to them here! Every gift they receive from Frisian hands, every glance from Jutish eyes, is a reminder that their king is dead—and unavenged!"

"I have sworn an oath to serve Finn," Hengist retorted, angrily because his heart burned with the same grief and shame that consumed these two. "That oath binds me; you, who are my men, are bound by any covenant I make. My honor is involved, and my honor is yours."

It was an argument he had used over and over to the two during that long Winter of suppressed bitterness; but this time Guthlaf and Oslaf were ready for it.

"It was an oath taken under compulsion," Guthlaf asserted, "and such an oath binds no man. The duty to avenge a man's murdered kin comes before any oath—surely before an oath extorted under the threat of Frisian spears!"

"Moreover, we are Danes, not Frisians!" Oslaf cried in sudden rage. "We stifle in this alien land! Are we never to see our homes again? Must we eat the bread of exile and drink our tears forever? Are we to lay our bones in Frisian soil, where none will mourn for us? Does your honor compel us to live in shame and die in misery? If you have not the spirit to avenge your dead, or the justice to let us avenge ours, at least give us leave to go home, where we may forget!"

Hengist was stung by the taunt, but his heart softened nonetheless. Well he knew the Dane's love of his home—had not the sea-girt isles called to him also, all the bleak Winter long? Not a word had these men uttered that he too had not thought and felt, hour by hour, day by day. He longed for revenge as they did; he yearned, like them, for home. However the Dane might wander for trade or booty, he always returned to his hearth. If ever he were moved to settle in a foreign land, he must have wife and children with him, must set up the images of his gods at the gate of the new homestead, must give the familiar Danish names to hill and brook and plain. And here, in a land where every foot of ground was alien, every hamlet bore a Frisian name, there could be no home for Danes.

Guthlaf and Oslaf saw that their words had sunk deep, and wisely forbore to speak further.

"Send Sigurd to me," Hengist said at last.

Oslaf strode to the door, but his brother remained. Soon Oslaf returned, Sigurd of the clan of the Sword-Danes at his side.

No man was more fearless, more cunning with the sword, than Sigurd; and none of the Danes was held so wise. All that Winter he had served his lord without a murmur, fighting at Hengist's side under the Frisian banner; never had he, like the others, sought to influence his prince's mind toward vengeance. No spot rested on Sigurd's honor; and for his integrity and wisdom Hengist revered him above all men, cherishing his counsel. Now Hengist repeated to him all that Guthlaf and Oslaf had said.

"Give me of your wisdom," the troubled prince concluded. "I know not what to do. To seek vengeance is to break my oath; to let my men go home is to break my word, since I have pledged them to Finn's service. I have pondered on these things till my heart is dark, and my mind never the clearer."

Sigurd, a huge man in the prime of life, stroked his flaming beard, and looked to Odin's image for guidance.

"My lord," he asked, "have not the gods advised you?"

"They speak not to me!" Hengist replied bitterly.

Sigurd frowned.

"When the gods will not answer, they are angry. You have kept faith with Finn, therefore it is not a violated pledge which stirs their wrath. There can, then, be but one thing which angers them—you have not avenged your uncle's blood!"

He paused; and Hengist, desperate for help, shot an eager question at him.

"You agree with these?"

His outflung arm swept toward the vengeful brothers.

"I agree with them," Sigurd answered with slow deliberation. "Two duties bind each man's honor: the duty to keep a pledged oath, and the duty to avenge the dead. Of these two, the higher duty is to avenge. The gods will forgive a broken pledge, if there is a compelling cause for breaking it; they never forgive a man who leaves his dead unpaid for. A slain man stifles in his grave, bathed in the burning drops of his own blood, till he is ransomed by the blood of the slayer, or the slayer's kin."

Hengist pondered on these things.

"Have the gods whispered this to you?" he asked.

"Nay, my lord," Sigurd answered honestly. "It is the wisdom that life has taught me. I have heard my dead cry out for vengeance, and have avenged them to end their anguish. Does not Hnaf cry out to you?"

Hengist started. This was the very stuff of his dreams, haunted ever by the bleeding vision of his murdered uncle. Was not that vision, after all, a message from the gods?

After long silence, turning his thoughts over in his mind, he turned again to Sigurd.

"My men long for home?" he questioned.

"Aye, as the dead long for revenge! They mutter one to another, whispering the names of their dear ones; they cry out against you, their lord, blaming all their wo, their dead comrades, their wretched exile, on you!"

Sharp as were Sigurd's words, he spoke calmly; and his answer was like a knife turned in Hengist's breast. Were they not right to blame him, who had sworn an oath which kept them here in exile, shamefully serving a king whose warriors had stricken down their comrades?

Seeing his emotion, Guthlaf resumed his implacable assault.

"Will you not let us go?" he demanded. "Will you do nothing to ease our wo?"

Hengist shook back his long locks from his eyes, as if to clear his vision.

"I will let you go!" he promised. "But though every word ye utter is as if it came from my own heart, I am not yet sure that ye are right. I must be guided by that which seems honorable to me, not to you; nor can any bear the burden of decision for me. Therefore hear my words:

"Until I am certain that vengeance is holier than my pledged word, I will keep faith with Finn. My oath calls for my service and the service of my men. Our numbers were four-score when I took the oath; therefore I owe him four-score warriors. Ye two, Guthlaf and Oslaf, shall now return to Denmark with half our men; the rest remain with me. Once at home, ye shall send me four-score new men; on their landing here I will let the rest of those who came to Frisia with me sail home under Sigurd's command. Thus at all times, save during the short space of the voyage thither and back, will the four-score men I owe Finn be here to serve him; and my honor will be clean till I can settle in my own heart the question of my right to avenge my uncle. Are ye satisfied?"

Sigurd, his eyes clouded, would have spoken; but Oslaf laid a hand on his arm. Guthlaf, catching his brother's glance, nodded.

"We are satisfied," he answered. "Do you, my lord, obtain Finn's assent to our sailing. He will not refuse, since we are to send back the full number he expects from us. We sail as soon as he consents."

"Be it so," the prince agreed; and the three chiefs left his presence.

Once in the open court, Oslaf turned to his brother.

"Let us speak with the Son of Hunlaf," he said.

THE Frisian king readily—gladly—approved Hengist's resolve. By shrewd wisdom as well as by courage had Finn carved out an empire for his people. He had perceived and read the struggle in Hengist's soul; read, too, the hostile thoughts of Hengist's warriors. Confident in his judgment of the young prince's character, Finn believed that Hengist would keep his oath unless goaded beyond endurance by his vengeful officers. Therefore Finn was glad to let these officers take their men back to Denmark, where he hoped they would stay forever.

He wanted Danes in his army, for they were the most invincible of spearmen and the most skilful of archers; but he much preferred four-score new men to those who had fought by Hnaf's side and now burned to avenge Hnaf. The Folk-Ruler was sure he could hold Hengist's loyalty until all who had come with Hnaf had departed—those who took their places would be easier to handle. He need only pay them enough, and they would be faithful to him.

Therefore, when examination showed that the Winter had shrunk the joints of Hnaf's ship, in which the Danes had come and planned to return, Finn at once placed a fast long-ship of his own at their disposal. He was eager to have them off, and in particular to see the last of Guthlaf and Oslaf.

Finn's conduct was well-reasoned; but it failed to take into account one element—the Danish character. Never having fought them, he had not learned that the Danes exceed every other people of the North in their thirst for vengeance. He counted on their love of home, and knew not that they would hate him and all that was his long after a Frisian would have ceased to hate.

THE morning after their talk with Hengist, Guthlaf and Oslaf, with forty men, sailed out of Finn's haven. Guthlaf held the steering-oar, his brother by his side. The long-ship, her single square sail bellied out with a favorable wind, took the waves with a fine bone in her teeth and a hissing of flung spume.

"Think you it will move him?" Oslaf asked suddenly.

Guthlaf smiled through tight lips.

"It cannot fail to move him. Hengist is honest. Once he says he will strike, his sword will not rest in his sheath till it has drunk deep."

Oslaf nodded.

"That is true. But will he promise to strike?"

Guthlaf's eyes glinted.

"Leave that to the Son of Hunlaf!"

Hengist's decision to send his men home did not ease his heart. The very excitement of their going tore at his troubled spirits; the words of Sigurd gave him no rest. He had stilled his men's reproaches, but he had not stilled his own conscience. The conflict still raged between his oath to Finn and the duty of vengeance for his uncle's death.

"Vengeance is more sacred than a plighted oath," Sigurd had said; and it was this which denied him peace. His strained nerves kept the vision of Hnaf constantly before him; his imagination was raw and festered with the thoughts on which it fed. The more it fed, the more inflamed it grew, till he dreamed every night that his uncle's ghost stood beside his bed, bathed in blood, torn with wounds, crying out on him for a coward who dared not avenge. With this vision his upright soul wrestled, sustained only by the consciousness that he had been true to his oath to Finn. Aye, but that oath had been extorted from him and his battle-weary little band, oppressed with horror at Hnaf's fall, surrounded by armed Frisians! And the gods kept silence, the gods, angered because he did not take revenge.

On the fourth morning he woke, exhausted and trembling with the moral struggle that grew the more terrible with sleep, and with the ghastly dreams that came in sleep. His body was drenched in sweat, his hands unsteady. It was in this state that the son of Hunlaf found him.

Hengist had his bed in a small outbuilding devoted to his sole use; the warriors slept in the loft, or on the benches lining three sides of the hall. Every morning one of his officers came to escort him into the hall, where he would give audience to his men, adjust disputes, assign orders for the day, and break his fast with them. This morning it was the turn of the son of Hunlaf to seek his lord.

The young man had something hidden under his cloak; but Hengist, wrung with his spiritual struggle, did not notice. Dully he returned the youth's greeting, and walked to the hall door, leaning on the arm of Hunlaf's son. At the dais his escort left him. Hengist sank into the high seat with a gasping sigh. His dreams had shaken him out of self-control.

The two-score Danes still left, destined to leave Frisia as soon as new forces came, clustered between the fire-pit and the dais, the flames shining on their mail. They were full-armed, as it was their duty to be when they appeared before their lord for formal audience. Brighter than their mail gleamed their eyes; but Hengist was too troubled with his own dark thoughts to heed.

When Hengist had mechanically uttered the time-honored words which declared the audience open, the son of Hunlaf strode to the very foot of the dais.

"I have a question to lay before my lord," he said; and his words fell labored, one by one, for he was greatly excited.

Hengist nodded, scarce hearing.

"It is this," the Son of Hunlaf continued. "Of two duties, which is the more sacred—to keep one's oath, or—*to avenge one's dead?*"

The words brought Hengist out of his brooding. His eyes widened with consternation; his hands clenched and unclenched on his knees; he drew in his breath hoarsely.

Hunlaf's Son shot a doubtful glance at Sigurd, who smiled back at him, nodding slightly. Mounting the dais in one swift stride, the son of Hunlaf took from beneath his mantle the thing he carried, and laid it gently on Hengist's lap, so that the prince's fingers touched it. Closing and unclosing with nervous tension, Hengist's hands encountered something hard, and grasped it tightly. As soon as his right hand took firm hold, the assembled Danes raised a shout of wild joy.

Hunlaf's son turned on them, his eyes blazing with victory.

"He accepts it!" he cried. "Our lord accepts the pledge of vengeance!"

Uncomprehending, Hengist looked at that which he had unconsciously clasped. Recognizing it, he shuddered with sudden realization of its meaning. Across his knees lay a sword, its hilt clutched in his own right hand— the sword of his slain uncle—the sword of Hnaf!

But how had it come there? It had been placed on Hnaf's funeral pyre, to burn with him, and thus to serve him in the life beyond the grave. Suddenly full understanding came to Hengist. Guthlaf and Oslaf had somehow stolen it from the pyre, and kept it to be used, through Hunlaf's son, when the time was ripe. And now, in his trouble of spirit, it had been laid in his lap by Hunlaf's son, where his hand must close on it.

To accept a sword is to accept any obligation that goes with it—to accept the sword of a slain man is to accept the duty of avenging him. A man may evade the duty by refusing the gift; but once his hand clasps its hilt, he has accepted sword and obligation. This rite, which men believed to have been instituted by Odin himself, Father of the Gods, was thrice holy; and from it there was no appeal.

"The gods have decided!" Sigurd cried; but Hengist, still in the grip of torturing doubt, ventured the appeal that did not exist.

"Let the gods give a sign!" he cried in a shaking voice.

Now at that moment Sigurd, striding forward to protest at Hengist's doubt, struck his foot against the end of one of the logs burning in the fire-pit. Dislodged, the log dropped one glowing end into the coals; a flame shot up, reflecting full on the carven face of Odin. In the flickering light, the god seemed distinctly to nod, thrice.

"The sign! The sign!" shouted Hunlaf's son; and Hengist, turning to follow the pointing finger, saw the firelight's play, and the god's third nod. Odin had cut the bonds which bound Hengist; the gods had declared for vengeance.

The irrevocable decision came to Hengist like healing to a wound. The responsibility was no longer his; it was Odin's. The long struggle was over; Hengist's burden rolled off his shoulders. He felt himself a man again, with a man's tasks and a man's strength. Rising to his feet, he brandished Hnaf's sword in hands that tingled with new power.

"Hear me, All-Father Odin!" he cried; and the jubilant Danes grew still to listen. "Hear me, ye Gods! By Gungnir, spear of Odin, by Odin's self, by Thor, Frey, and Tyr, I swear that this sword shall not be sheathed till it has drunk deep of Jutish blood, and the spirit of Hnaf shall be appeased!"

The Danes would have shouted again, but he hushed them with a gesture.

"Hostile ears are keen," he warned them. "We must be wary if we would succeed."

All gathered closer about the dais, the chiefs at Hengist's very feet, their followers as close as they could press. Hengist felt his senses thrill to their eagerness. Decision—any decision—would have brought him relief; the gods themselves having intervened to wrest from him the decision that his own heart most craved, he was now his old, ardent self. His eyes sparkled with the prospect of action; his sinews tautened as for battle. He spoke with a new wisdom, the fruit of his unhappy Winter of self-searching:

"We are too few to venture now; we must wait till Guthlaf and Oslaf send us the new men. Then ye will not return—we shall number a hundred men. I will find some pretext to explain your staying. When the time is ripe, we must find a way to fall on the Jutes alone, before the Frisian host can come to their support. It will be hard; the Jutes will outnumber us nigh six to one. But the gods have chosen the road we must take, and they will guide us along it."

Sigurd, his eyes lowered, caressed his beard. At length he looked Hengist full in the face, and spoke that which he had hitherto kept hidden:

"My lord, we shall not be outnumbered. Guthlaf and Oslaf took with them all the gold and precious stuff that Finn has given us since we first came hither. With this treasure they will hire, not four-score, but as many men as the gold will buy—at least fifteen hundred, and ships to bear them hither again. They will wait to sail till the weather is smooth; then they will make all haste. When they are almost within sight of Frisian land, they will cruise offshore till night. Under cover of dark they will land, making for that part of the shore which it is our duty to guard. Finn posts a few Frisians with us for safety's sake; them we must overpower as soon as we hear the muted notes of Guthlaf's trumpet. Beyond that our plans are not made—it is for you to complete them."

In the gladness of his relieved heart, Hengist did not blame his men for the plot they had made without his knowledge. He seized on it with joy.

"We shall win, then!" he cried. "When Guthlaf's host lands, we must march swiftly for the highroad where it forks, one branch leading to Finn's stronghold, the other to the hall of the Jutes. It will be the task of the first detachment to hold the Frisians in play—a perilous duty—while the other overwhelms our foes. But mark ye this: No harm must come to Finn, for he is a man, and has dealt honorably with us. Our quarrel is with the Jutes alone."

"And on them we will wreak it!" the son of Hunlaf muttered between set teeth.

III

HENGIST'S plans unfolded with utter smoothness; it was plain to all the Danes that the gods fought on their side. Guthlaf and Oslaf, their men's mail muffled with wadding of woolen strips, landed in hushed silence; then, at the muted sound of the trumpet, the Danish coast-guard sprang upon the handful of Frisians detailed to make sure of their good faith. Borne under by numbers, the Frisians were swiftly bound, gagged, and hidden in the thick reeds by the shore. Then Guthlaf led up his men—two thousand hard-bit fighters, mad with war-lust after their four-day confinement aboard ship. But neither Guthlaf nor Oslaf had been too excited to steer their prows for the point where the Danes held guard; not for nothing had the brothers patrolled this point till they knew it in the darkest night. They had even planned the precaution, before their departure, of having Sigurd send out a small boat to listen for the beat of their oars, and guide them in if they missed the proper landing.

As best he could in the night, Hengist surveyed his new men, striding up and down the ranks, issuing orders. He spoke softly, giving his commands to the chiefs as he came to them; all were bidden to reply in whispers, lest the voices of so many be heard by some lurking Frisian.

But the Frisians were all unsuspecting in their dwellings, save those who guarded the shore; and those posted at this point were disposed of. Quickly Hengist led his host straight inland, till he was well-past all the coast-guard; then they turned off toward the royal road. For half an hour they marched along it in silence, setting down their feet softly, taking care not to march in step, lest their footfall be heard.

Hengist halted them at the fork in the road, told off the leaders of one-third the host to march to the royal hall, under Guthlaf and Oslaf, and bade these make a pretended attack.

"Do not close in," he bade them, "nor come within arrow-range; but shout loudly, clash your weapons, and retreat slowly if the Frisians attack. If they take fright, and keep within the palisade, hold them there as long as ye can. Finn has no more than eight hundred spears on duty; we can achieve our purpose before his runners can rouse the country."

No instructions were needed for those who were to march with Hengist to the Jutish hall. Their purpose was simple—to attack and to destroy, before Finn could beat off or outmaneuver Guthlaf and Oslaf. This they could surely do. Peace having been made with the Franks, Finn had dismissed the militia that made up the vast bulk of his army, and retained at court only his professional house-carles, the greatest number the royal stores could feed.

Under a moonless sky pricked with tiny stars, the two divisions took their respective roads. No man spoke, all advanced with infinite care. They had even cast aside their scabbards, lest these betray them by clanking against their mail.

They passed no villages; for a hall that has to house many men must stand alone amid the wide fields and pasture lands needed to supply its occupants with food. The cocks were crying their first challenge from distant hamlets when Hengist's division caught the loom of the Jutish palisade, a deeper shadow against the night, a little down the road.

Fortune held with them. The Jutes had drunk deep that night, and even the sentries slept. The Danes might have rushed the gate unresisted had not a man in the front rank dropped his shield with a clang of iron rim against the beaten earth of the road. Then, stirring in his unlawful slumber, a sentinel challenged; the cry was taken up by another; shouts of alarm and the rattle of mail issued from the palisade; torches flared.

"Storm!" roared Hengist. With a hungry shout the Danes hurled themselves at the gate. Their sheer momentum tore loose its bars, and they plunged within, hurling aside the few guards.

But it was a different matter to rush the hall. They had not prepared torches to fire it, lest the gleam be seen by the distant Frisians, and Finn understand that the attack on his own hall was but a blind to cover Hengist's onslaught on the Jutes. The Danes must overpower their foes by force of arms.

But these were now awake and arming. Though half-drunk and wholly surprized, the Jutes were veterans, able to cope with sudden attack. By the time the first Danes streamed to the hall-doors, javelin-men manned the loopholes, and the Jutish spearmen, flinging on their mail, snatching up shields and pikes, were rushing to their stations.

The Danish advantage in numbers was partly offset by the shelter afforded the Jutes by their walls. The fight raged savagely at both doors, and at every loophole which the Danes strove to command with massed spear-points. The Jutes could not sally, but they could hold their ground and take sharp toll of their foes.

In the frenzy of midnight battle, Hengist never knew how long the conflict lasted. He knew only that his arm ached with striking; that Hnaf's sword dripped blood over his hands, his arms, his very shoulders; that he marshaled column after column against the doors without breaking through. But the Jutes, desperately as they fought, were heavy with ale, which clutched at their stomachs and made their breath short. The savagely renewed assaults found them slowly failing. At the tenth onslaught the north door was carried. Over a heap of dead Jutes and Danes, heaped helter-skelter in the last agony, Hengist led his column roaring into the reeking hall. As their spears swept along the bloody floor, the south door gave way, and Sigurd smote lustily through the hedge of spears that still opposed him.

In this moment of near-won victory a messenger from Guthlaf rode up breathless on a horse looted from Finn's stables. Flinging himself from the saddle, he pressed into the mass of fighting men, forced a way through to Hengist, and made the war-drunk prince hear him.

"Finn sallied out on us!" he gasped. "We are outmanned. Help, or the Frisians will eat us up!" Having given his message, he leaped into the saddle again, and rode back to die.

Hengist's shouts were lost in the whooping of the exultant Danes, and the anvil clangor of blade on shield. In desperation he sounded his trumpet. At the fourth raucous blast, the yells died down, and the victors held their hands. Nearly half the Jutes were down, dead or wounded past help; the others, backed sullenly against the walls, had cast aside their spears as too long for such desperate work, and bravely held their own with swords and lapped shields. The end was sure, but a stout defense from such formation could endure for hours.

Swiftly Hengist made known the plight of Guthlaf and Oslaf. The Jutes greeted the news with joyous shouts; but Sigurd's face was grim.

"Must we leave these unfinished?" he cried, pointing his red axe at the Jutes.

"Never!" Hengist answered. "Do you see to them. I will take three hundred men and relieve Guthlaf. If the gods will, we shall drink the victory-cup to Odin together when the next sun sets."

That sun was rising as he and his three

hundred ran from the palisade into the highroad and formed for the march to Finn's garth. It flashed crimson on their bloodied mail, and sparkled on their wet spears. Swiftly, without pausing to breathe after their struggle in the hall, they struck out on the two-mile road that separated them from their hard-pressed comrades. In their zeal they advanced almost at the double, panting, their laboring chests rising and falling like great bellows.

The shouts and clangor of the fight were loud in their ears when Hengist halted them for a brief rest before they should be fit for a second battle. They were full in sight of the conflict, and the spectacle of it made it hard for Hengist to hold them. Held they must be if they were to enter the fray with vigor enough to win.

Before them rose the vast circle of stakes that hedged in the royal enclosure; just above the sharpened points of the palisade rose the gables of the great Frisian hall, the outbuildings—stables, kitchens, servants' quarters, storehouses, and barracks. Between the gate and the halted array of Hengist struggled the confronting forces of Finn and Guthlaf; the Danes half-surrounded by the greater Frisian host. Guthlaf had marshaled his men in a hollow square, shield touching shield, ranks three deep. About them raged the Frisians, big square-made men in splendid armor, not leaping in and stabbing, but in dense, even ranks, wreaking havoc with their great axes. The sun, now mounting the eastern sky, flashed blindingly from their polished armor.

Finn, master of war-craft, had contrived to lure the Danes within the palisade, and had massed the bulk of his men behind the hall while holding Guthlaf's men in play at its main entrance—thus taking them at the same disadvantage they had planned for him. Then, leading a lightning attack against the Danish right wing, commanded by Oslaf, Finn had driven them back through the gate, outflanked them, and cut in with the pick of his veterans between them and the road. His reserves, in a second onslaught, had forced Guthlaf's command to retire on their hard-pressed comrades.

Guthlaf and Oslaf, by heroic exertions, succeeded only in gaining enough respite to reform their men and maintain a united defensive. Their valor told; but where Finn led in person, his house-carles assailed the Danes with a steady ferocity that rent great gaps in the hard-pressed shield-wall. Bravely as the Danish second and third ranks fed themselves into the breach made by the fallen, the Frisian ride was eating away their living rampart; and soon it must crumble to let in the deluge.

All this Hengist, still halted, saw; saw, too, that the royal hall, the stables, and several of the outbuildings were burning. Guthlaf and Oslaf had penetrated deep into the court with sword and flame before Finn's greater host had driven them out. From within the palisade still rang the shrieks of tortured horses; the screams of women stabbed through the tumult of the fight.

After this men had breathed deep, and while their limbs still twitched with eagerness, Hengist swiftly formed them into wedge-formation—the "array of Odin." His red banner with the rampant white horse of Odin was shaken out; the outer ranks leveled their spears for the onset. But the Frisians were aware of them. Shifting his formation, Finn interposed the bulk of his force between Guthlaf and the gate, and led the rest in a swift about-face and advance to meet Hengist. These last, almost equal in numbers to Hengist's three hundred, he captained himself.

Of all his host, Finn alone was mounted—proof of the effectiveness with which Guthlaf and Oslaf had met his strategy, since he could not spare even his grooms from the fighting to rescue the horses from the burning stables. Alone before his front rank the old king rode, a mighty figure of a man, for all his eight-and-fifty years. He wore no cloak above the bloodied mail of his massive chest; his thick, hard arms were bare from the elbow; his lightly silvered yellow beard bushed about thin lips; and his blue eyes gleamed frostily. Holding in his excited horse with his left hand, he held his broad sword lightly in his right; his shield clanged against the steel rings on his back. Slowly, in silence, he led his men to meet Hengist's straining wedge, held back as if choosing the moment when their onrush would be most devastating.

But Hengist still held them when Finn halted the Frisian ranks. That stern figure, with its broad, set face, its glittering eyes, held his spirit bound; the remembrance of his oath rose again to torture him. This

Finn was a man, a man of men, and with him Hengist had not kept faith. The broken pledge gave Finn a moment's advantage, which he saw, and used.

The solitary figure on the great horse was now a fair spear-cast from the point of the Danish wedge; the Frisians were ranked a little behind them. In their rear the battle still swayed and clamored, Frisians using every moment of respite, Danes holding stubbornly against numbers that now were even, and wondering as they fought why Hengist did not charge.

Raising his wet sword in a commanding gesture, Finn spoke; his voice boomed through the din like thunder through the chatter of a crowd:

"End this slaughter, Hengist! Why should good men die for us? Man to man, blade to blade, let us settle our own quarrel!"

Hengist thrilled to the challenge; yet he was unwilling.

"There is blood between me and thee," he answered, "and an oath which I have broken. I did right to break it: the gods bade me, and I was bound to avenge my dead. Yet how shall I fight you when I have broken faith with you?"

Finn's gesture seemed to sweep his words aside.

"Think not of your oath!" he urged. "I wronged you when I made you give it; you have indeed done right to break it. I did not think you would; yet I esteem you the more that you let nothing stand between your honor and the revenge it demands. Join blades with me, and save those who die for us!"

Yet Hengist still hesitated.

"I did not wish your death," he protested. "I sent my spears against you only to prevent your host from interfering while I avenged my uncle's murder on your Jutes. Your death would be most bitter to me. You are husband to my uncle's sister; you have been faithful and gracious to me; you are such a man as the earth has seldom seen. Call off your spears; let my men go in peace. Why should the blood of Jutes stand between us?"

Finn's eyes glowed.

"Duty to your uncle's ghost binds you," he answered slowly. "Duty to those who have taken my wage binds me. Think you I would leave to your swords those Jutes who have served me? This fight must go on till Dane or Frisian fall. Better that the death of one of us should end it than that a thousand men should perish!"

Hengist nodded.

"So be it," he agreed. "It is the way of honor. If I slay you, your men are to lay down their arms; all that is yours shall pass into our hands, save only that the lives and liberty of the Frisians shall be spared. The Jutes, dead or alive, shall be ours to deal with. Now rescue your women and your horses!"

"That is fair," Finn assented. "And if I prevail, then your men's lives shall be spared, but all that they have shall be mine; and such Jutes as ye have not already slain shall live. Sigwald, sound my trumpet!"

From the Frisian ranks a horn blew twice; and as a thunderstorm subsides with one last detonation, so the Frisians, with one last flurry of arms, left off their hammering at the tattered square of Guthlaf. The Danes, too, obeyed the signal, understanding that their princes had reached some agrement. Weary arms fell, exhausted men relaxed, casting down their heavy shields with grunts of relief. Dane joined with Frisian to save the Frisian womenfolk and their beasts from the flaming buildings.

A Frisian herald made known the terms of the bargain between Finn and Hengist. The fight was to be to the death—neither should receive aid. If any man on either side interfered in the duel, the battle should be resumed, and eternal disgrace should stain the name of him who provoked it. That side whose leader fell should, without striking a blow, permit the other to work its will—save that no more lives but Jutish lives should be taken. That which went on in the hall of the Jutes, two miles away, no man could now prevent; it should not count in the bargain.

Dismounting, Finn passed his left arm through the straps of his shield. The warriors all drew away from the two champions, forming a vast circle, in the midst of which the duelists eyed each other warily. Finn's age caused Hengist no compunction, nor was there need for any. Finn was a mighty warrior, still as agile as a youth, bigger and stronger than the Dane. Many a man, in both hosts, deemed that Finn would conquer.

Swords touched; then, with a ring of steel and clatter of bucklers, the champions closed. For a space the two faced each other full, each with one foot forward, leaning into the stroke, shield high to meet the answering blow. But when their crashing swords had splintered the shields even to the bosses, and blood was spouting from rents in each man's mail, then they began to circle, dodging beneath cuts and leaping for openings.

Finn strove with all his giant strength, driving home his steel with all his weight, his face a stern mask. Hengist fought with dash and fury, and an elastic strength he had never known before. Hnaf's sword in his hand seemed to hack and thrust of itself, faster than he was aware of guiding it; it was as if his uncle's spirit infused his own will into the living steel. So, when Finn leaped suddenly in to strike the young Dane down with one awful back-stroke, Hengist never knew how his own blade licked out to meet the Frisian. The next moment Finn, bored through from breast to back, fell into his arms.

The blood-mist cleared from Hengist's brain; the passing of his anger left him conscious of a sudden great sorrow. He had won; his men were victorious and safe; the Jutes were in his hands; Hnaf was avenged. Aye; but Finn, his kinsman by marriage, was dying in his arms—and victory seemed almost less bearable than defeat and shame.

Gently he laid the old man down, and bending over him, wiped the bloody froth from his lips. Though death had its hand on him, Finn's failing eyes saw tears gleaming in those of Hengist; and his hand, so weak now, groped for the Dane's.

"It is the will of the gods," he whispered feebly. "Your honor is bright again. Forgive—forgive me that I—made you—take—oath!"

Hengist's arms tightened about him. He had admired the living Finn; Finn dying by his hand he loved.

"Be tender—to—Hildeburg!" Finn murmured.

For the first time Hengist thought of his aging aunt, Finn's queen. The first outbreak of war, in which Hnaf fell, had cost her the lives of son and brother; now Hengist had slain her husband. Alone in the winter of her years, what joy was left for her? His heart smote him; his grief for his own deed was greater than he could bear.

Finn read his thoughts.

"Grieve not!" he gasped. "You have—borne yourself—like a man! The gods call me—farewell!"

When the old man was dead, Hengist called Oslaf to him, and sent the chief at top speed, on Finn's horse, to the Jutish hall.

IV

ABOVE the flat plain sloping to the dreary sea, a single mound of fresh-turned earth uprose. Its crest was concave; and in the sandy bowl rested a huge pyramid of fagots. A pile of weapons crowned that pyramid, gold and silver, jewel-studded neck-bands and twisted rings of gold. In the midst of his splendor lay Finn the Folk-Ruler on his shield, his sword in his nerveless hand.

North of the mound, on horses levied from the countryside, the Frisian warriors waited in serried ranks. On the south were the Danes, each warrior full-armed, to do honor to the dead. Alone against the sky, Hengist stood by the dead king's bier, torch in hand. It was the will of both peoples that he, at once the slayer and the nearest male kinsman of the dead, should light the funeral-pyre.

But the time was not yet come. Disarmed, guarded by fifty spearmen, the scant two hundred Jutes who still lived when Oslaf brought Hengist's command to spare them, were marching toward the mound.

From the east they approached it, on foot, each man with arms bound behind his back. On and on they came, silent, the two hosts of horsemen watching them wordlessly. Halted before they reached the mound, so that they should not be screened by it from the gaze of all, they were herded together and encompassed by their guards—equal companies of Danes and Frisians. Long they stood there, none speaking to them. It was Hengist's will that none should utter a reproach: the sight of the dead should be reproach enough. Let the Jutes look on that which the treason of their leaders had wrought.

From the western foot of the mound, a woman's wailing rose; and the serried horsemen, Danes and Frisians, shuddered at its poignant grief. Slowly, most slowly, her gray hair unbound, the Frisian queen climbed to the foot of the bier. There, in a fearful burst of sobbing, she clung to her slain lord's feet.

Hengist was by her side, his lips twitching and gray. Not till her sobs came slow and labored did he touch her; then, raising her gently, he gave her into the hands of her women, who led her down the mound.

Hengist held his torch aloft—to the north, then to the south, the east, the west, hallowing the bier. Then he lowered its flame to the pyre. A faint crackling arose; a thin ribbon of smoke spiraled aloft. The breathing of the horsemen seemed as loud as thunder.

At last a clear point of flame shot from the heart of the fagots, licking the bier. At its signal, the mounted men broke into simultaneous motion. Slowly, evenly, they rode about the mound, from north to south, from south to north, chanting softly the funeral-song. Danes and Frisians met and passed before the bound and frightened Jutes, who momentarily expected the spears to strike them down as a death-offering to Finn's spirit. But the horsemen passed.

Again and again they passed, riding faster and faster, chanting ever louder as the flames swelled above them. Now their song was like the moan of the sea, now like the roll of thunder. Each time they passed in a tumultuous rhythm of hoof-beats and song, the sand flew from their horses' feet into the faces of the cowering Jutes.

The fire died down and fell in, with a rain of embers, upon the ashes of Finn. Hengist, long since driven down the mound by the heat, approached the Jutes; and from either side the horsemen drew closer to them, till the Danes halted on their right, and the Frisians on their left. The chanting died as Hengist strode forward to face the waiting multitude.

"Finn has risen to the gods," he announced in solemn tones; and from a Frisian officer, Captain of the Household Troops, came the formal answer—

"He was best of men, kindest of kings, bravest in battle, most glorious in renown!"

Guthlaf, riding out a pace from the Danish ranks, pointed to the Jutes.

"What shall we do with these?" he asked; and his voice was hard with menace. "Tomorrow we sail home, leaving this land—and we leave no debts unpaid!"

"Give them to us!" the Frisian captain spoke. "Their treason and greed first broke the peace between Frisian and Dane, and prepared all our wo. Let us feed them to the spirit of Finn!"

The Jutes shuddered, understanding the nature of the death implied in this man's words.

But Hengist, fronting them all, refused.

"They have paid already," he said. "Hnaf's spirit is content; and Finn died to save these Jutes. Dearly has their blood been bought; I will not let any spill more of it. And ye, my people—when ye sail home, I sail not with you!"

The Danes cried out in consternation; and Guthlaf fell at his lord's feet.

"What will you do, my lord?" he implored. "You can not bide here among an alien folk! We must bear the queen back to her father's people, and who so close to her as you, to console her in her sorrow? Who shall rule over us of the South-Danes but you, our prince, nephew to our king?"

Hengist smiled gravely, sorrowfully, at him.

"You shall take the Lady Hildeburg home," he answered, "and upon you I lay the charge of her comfort. Let who will rule the South-Danes—I can not. Nor shall I bide with the Frisians, whose king I slew; but I can not go home with you.

"To him whom the fire has borne to Odin"—he pointed upward to the smoking mound—"I swore an oath; that oath I broke. In honor I broke it; but the breaking was dishonorable. I am forsworn, and one forsworn can not be a king of the Danes. Therefore I must not lead you more, must never see my home again."

He turned toward the Jutes.

"Unbind them!" he cried. A moment the Danes and Frisians, astounded, did not obey; but at his impatient gesture they carried out his command. Nor were they more dumfounded than the Jutes, who had expected death.

"These Jutes," Hengist resumed, "by treachery slew my uncle, and by their treachery we were forced to take oath to Finn. In breaking that oath, though we pleased the gods, we were treacherous. The treason of a warrior is not his guilt, but the guilt of his lord, whose order he must obey. Thus on me alone rests all the guilt for our faithlessness and for the death of Finn.

"I can never again lead honorable men—and honorable men ye Danes are, your guilt being on my shoulders. But dishonored men, who, like me, have broken their pledges, I can lead. Ye Jutes, men without honor, will ye take me, who am also honorless, for your lord, as I take you for my warriors?"

Frisians stared open-mouthed; Danes cried out in rage and grief; the Jutes, incredulous, gaped and muttered.

"My uncle's murder has been wiped out by the toll our swords have taken of you," Hengist addressed them. "In token that vengeance has been satisfied, I laid Hnaf's sword on Finn's pyre, and the fire has eaten it. Will ye be my men?"

A Jutish officer found his voice.

"To what end, my lord? We dare not stay here—the Frisians would slay us; we can not go to our own land, being, as thou hast said, men without honor. What wouldst thou do with us?"

"There are boats," Hengist replied, "and there are many lands whence fierce adventures beckon. To the west lies Britain, where honorless men may find rich booty, and hard fighting to restore their honor. Fear not; I shall know how to lead you to both—and to teach you to be faithful!"

The Danes entreated, stormed, wept; but Hengist would not be moved. It was the Frisian captain who spoke the mind of his people:

"If your honor is stained, it is yet stained honorably; and honorably do you propose to cleanse it. We will give you ships!"

And so the Danes went home, bearing the sorrow-stricken Hildeburg to her own people.

So, too, on the day following Hengist and his Jutes set forth over the sea to find their honor again. In Kent they found it, and in the blood of Britons did they wash it clean.

TOURISTS

by Raymond S. Spears

THOUSANDS, literally millions, of people are making automobile tours of varied distances. The instinctive urge to migrate has found its ready answer in flivver or twelve-cylinder limousine. Any highway leads to all the roadways in the country. One can roll out of his own yard, along his own alley, and strike the transcontinental, or ocean to ocean trail—and the land of the Nation lies before him.

Never was adventure so completely at the command of average humanity. The home-bodies, who twenty years ago regarded a fifty, even a twenty-mile journey with dread, now roll away forty miles after supper to visit some sister, brother or friend. Actually, it is easier to drive an automobile five hundred miles than it used to be to drive a horse seventy-five miles.

Some regions are and always must be an adventure to visit; the Rockies, the deserts, the Sierras, for example, offer some highway approaches. But for all time precipices must be skirted, thirst confronted, and the possibility of cloudburst or accident figured into one's calculations on that stretch of twelve hundred or so miles, from eastern Rockies to western Sierras.

No less interesting are the Cumberlands, the Appalachian system that reaches from Katahdin to the picturesque bluffs that mark the Great Bend of the Tennessee. Fine roads lead one to the forested mountains, but the ridges and the valleys are forever the answer of the human longing to climb, and no matter how well the main trails are built, side roads are sure to lead into difficulty and make demand on the tourist's ingenuity and resourcefulness.

The marvel is that so few of the automobile travelers—men, women, and children—do meet genuine, hard-to-bear troubles. Lacking money, husky manhood rustles a job; a mother takes care of an ailing child; and a break-down or stall in desert waste or bottom-land flood but seems to add to the joy of one's lists of memories.

The water-tank on the running board is sure sign of the tourist's experience and preparedness. With good water, almost any kind of grub, and makeshift outfit—well, five million wanderers are answering the road call.

The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

IF ANY of you had an idea it's easy to write fiction based on history and keep true to historical facts as well as make an interesting story, the following from Hugh Pendexter ought to help change your mind.

It happens he and I spent the last week-end together and, while I knew early American history had been a life-long hobby of his and that he spared no effort in getting all the reliable data he could lay his hands on—well, I didn't know there *was* so darned much history as he's got stored up in him. There were times when I felt sort of creepy—seemed as if he sort of slipped back *into* those old times and was living in them instead of now. Left me with a feeling that a fellow couldn't name any character in American history that Hugh Pendexter couldn't tell you about—not just the main facts you find in any history, but the intimate, detailed things about him—what kind of underwear he wore, if any; what he usually had for breakfast, if any; where he was at 10:47 A.M., April 24, 1748 or 1848 or any other old date; who his aunts were and what he thought about them, if any; what kind of guns he carried, where he got 'em, what he paid for 'em, if any; whether he slept on his left side, whether he would have done better in the outfield or behind the bat, and whether it was safe for his wife, if any, to speak to him before he'd fed in the morning. I can't see what any man *wants* to know so —— much for or how he can do it and yet keep acting just like an ordinary fellow instead of swelling up and busting.

AND he isn't even satisfied with himself. Seems to feel he's just beginning to get a toe-hold on the past. Books? Getting 'em all the time from both sides of the Atlantic. If his library were laid out in a row I'd refuse to walk from one end of it to the other without carrying a lunch and maybe dinner. And he's got 'em all *in* him! Darn him, I'm glad it's giving him trouble, as the following letter shows. Think of it! Worrying himself bald-headed because in his story he wanted his hero to put up at the International Hotel on Jackson Street, between Montgomery and Kearny, in 1853, but the International wasn't opened till the Spring of 1854 and even then wasn't completed, so he had to send him to the Rassette House but the fire of May 2nd destroyed the latter, so he had to change the time of the scene anyway. Gosh!

BUT, joshing aside, it is just that insistence upon absolute accuracy and dependability that makes his stories what they are. He is taking the past of our country and making it live itself over before our eyes. There is only one way to do that, and that way spells endless research and limitless care and unfailing conscientiousness.

Has it ever occurred to you that in his fiction stories taken as a whole Hugh Pendexter is writing a complete history of our country? That he is writing its history as it has never been written before? Making it live again instead of merely recording it? Making it intimate and comprehensive, a real picture of the times instead of a mere analysis and record?

Told in fiction form, yes. But he uses the fiction vehicle, however interesting in itself, merely *as* a vehicle. Comparatively few Americans read histories; most Americans read fiction. He has discovered the secret, not of writing the usual historical fiction, but of writing real history in such a way that thousands who would not otherwise know the history of our country will set about amusing themselves and end up by knowing their country's very dramatic and very splendid past.

THERE is a step beyond. He is doing something else. He is Americanizing. Americanizing not only the foreign-born who come to our shores but Americanizing Americans who were born and raised here. He is showing what of heart and brain and muscle went into the building of America—showing us, therefore, that the result of this brave, strenuous building must be, despite the flaws that sometimes look so big to us, something very big and splendid and worth while. Something to be proud of, to maintain, to make still better.

He is already becoming recognized as *the* authority on the American Indian. I predict, quite conscious of the largeness of the claim, that some day he will be accepted as *the* authority on American history in general. It will be a shining day for this country when his books are made supplementary reading in all its schools. That will go far toward making a generation of Americans that *are* Americans.

YOU know that I am not in the habit of praising at Camp-Fire stories in our magazine. I'm not praising them now. Nor am I complimenting Hugh Pendexter or the magazine that prints his stories. I'm merely recognizing facts that it is good for Americans to recognize. I'm thinking only of Americanization, which we native-born need about as much as any foreign-born who come to us. And my purpose in talking about it is the very concrete one of urging you to *use* this instrument that Hugh Pendexter puts into our hands. It is propaganda for America, for the real America that not even the politicians, the fanatics and the deliberate enemies can take wholly away from us. Use it, spread it, help it do its work. God knows that work is needed!

Norway, Maine.

So rapidly did events swing into procession during the gold-days of California I found the writing of "Old Misery" harder than I had anticipated. So much has been written about California I refrained from adding to the list. The story was long in my mind, but I have put it aside and given Idaho, Montana, Nevada and Colorado camps the right of way. I do not know whether it was a sense of timidity or of being presumptuous that held me back, even while my story-plot was champing at the bit. When I did plunge in I found what I have said in the first two lines above. I could wash from my mind all the romantics of Harte and other writers, all the realism and fantasy of yet other writers, but to fit the plot to a certain season of a certain year called for much fiddling around with the pure mechanics of plot-structure.

I HAD planned to have the action begin in the Spring and terminate before Plains travel was closed by Winter. I selected the year 1854 and made three starts, sprinting for as many chapters each time, without having the result impress me as being a series of facts. I had planned to have the vicious element represented by the survivors of Murieta's band, not wishing to bring him on the stage, as his history is too well known—say, like that of the James Boys. I shifted the time back to 1853 and permitted him to appear once and in a mask. The story soon appealed to me as being a recital of actual happenings, but then came the bother of reconstructing details of early history. The hero in the first version put up at the International Hotel, on Jackson Street, between Montgomery and Kearny, but the International was not opened until the Spring of '54 and even then was not completed. For '53 I selected the Rassette House, but had to time the Frisco scene to escape the May 2nd fire, which destroyed that hotel. But, so long as the place must burn, I utilized the fire in masking *Joe Gilbert's* flight.

Every eating-house, street and store mentioned in the first version had to be checked up and often changed when I shifted the time back one year. This was necessary not only for San Francisco but for the whole distance covered in the course of the yarn. Quartz mining was booming in '54, whereas confidence in it was just being restored in '53. Originally I had the telegraph aiding in the search for Gilbert, and wept bitterly in tossing away a tense description of the slim tentacles reaching out to find him.

Doggone, if almost every thing that fitted in '54 didn't have to be chucked or changed for '53. Floods as well as fires had to be carefully plotted. I made a regular time-table of both. I didn't wish him to arrive in Sacramento when the place was awash. And in landing him on a dry levee there was the danger of his having been burned up in a mighty conflagration in Frisco. Threading my way successfully through these two cities, there remained Marysville and Nevada City. To pull off a dramatic incident in any town or city I had to make sure the place was not on fire at the time, or under water. Then again "cities" of '52 were deserted in '53, and prosperous centers of '53 were in the discard in '54. I would apologize for what must seem to be a confession instead of an addenda of possibly interesting sidelights if I did not feel it is the most difficult locale I have ever tackled; and if I did not realize that the editor can blue-pencil it down to the bone.

IN ONE reference to the bandit I find his name given as "Joaquin Murieta Carrillo." I made no use of the last name, as in repeated other references to him he is just "Joaquin Murieta." Much of the data concerning him was obtained from contemporary articles written for the *Overland Monthly* and kindly sent me by W. A. Chalfant, historian of Inyo County, Cal. The description of the El Dorado gambling saloon is to be found in "The Annals of San Francisco," an invaluable reference source for all that pertains to the city's history up to the Spring of '54. Lola Montez, actress, was in Grass Valley in '54. Doubtless I anticipated her arrival by a year in having her there in '53. She married a well-to-do miner, absorbed his fortune. Death or divorce separated them and she annexed another. Male chroniclers of those times speak of her as the "notorious Lola Montez," but I have no doubt Lola had to look after Number One and played the game no more selfishly than did her admirers. Yuba Bill was a well-known stage-driver late in the "fifties." Whether he was on the Nevada City line in '53 I do not know. If he wasn't, my Yuba Bill was another chap of the same name.

I have exaggerated none in introducing the gold-discovering devices that were snapped up by greenhorns and often invented and sold in good faith. The country was littered with all I have mentioned and many others, including diving-suits, even more weird and quaint.

IN THE Pacific Railway Surveys report to the War Department that volume having to do with explorations and surveys made in California during and after the time of my story makes mention more than once of the tame grizzly bears in the camps and towns and the trade done in them; of their wrestling with men, etc. In "Heroes of California," by Geo. Wharton James, chapter 20 is devoted to the famous grizzly bear hunter, James Capen Adams, who taught two huge grizzlies to carry packs and accompany him on his hunting trips. His adventures, as presented by Theodore H. Hittell, his methods of hunting and taming grizzlies and other wild animals, make interesting reading.

THE belief among native Californians that the "Yankees" brought a change for the worse in climate was quite common and is commented on by several contemporary writers. Also was it commonly believed that a drunken sailor ranked a Dutchman and a negro for luck in finding gold. In the early years, extending beyond the time of my story, many veteran prospectors firmly believed in the existence of a mother-lode, the birthplace of all gold, thrown up by a volcano. I repeatedly found in my research work the statement of various writers, separated by distance and time, to the effect that coyotes and wolves will not touch a dead Mexican. The explanation given usually is that the Mexican eats so much peppery food his flesh tastes of it. Some veterans of the Mexican War vouch for the fact that Mexican dead were never touched by these scavangers but that men of other races were eaten.

IT WAS on the testimony of Ana Benites, one of Murieta's band, that Benito Lopez and Cipriano Sandoval were convicted and hung for the murder of General J. H. Bean, who was assassinated a November evening, 1852, while riding home from his store in San Gabriel (Bancroft's "Popular Tribunals," Vol. I, p. 491). When arrested with others the Benites girl swore Sandoval confessed the killing, and she supplied a wealth of details. Sandoval protested his innocence to the last. Lopez confessed to several murders. Bancroft says that five years after this execution it was discovered that Sandoval did not kill Bean, but that the assassin, rich and influential, confessed on his death-bed. Sandoval gets a clean bill of health as a simple, unknown shoemaker of San Gabriel. Somewhere in the story I have *Old Misery* refer to the Lost Cabin Mine (also called Lost Cabins Mine). A few months ago a Western friend (friend, although we never met) urged me to write a novel about the Lost Cabin Mine, placing the scene in Oregon. I took kindly to the idea, but in securing data for the present story I repeatedly came upon references to this lost mine, and it was to be found somewhere in Northern California, in different parts of Oregon, and as frequently in Washington. Behind the legend undoubtedly is an intriguing basis of fact.

TOM TOBIN was a well-known mountain man and was with Maxwell and Carson and other veterans in many an Indian fight. With Carson, Joaquin Leroux and Uncle Dick Wooton he served as scout and guide for Major Greer's expedition (Second U. S. Dragoons) to exterminate White Wolf and his Apaches for the Massacre of the White family in the Canyon of the Canadian, ninety miles east of Fort Union, New Mexico. The trail was three weeks old and snow had fallen when the scouts took the field. Yet they followed it for four hundred miles and would have surprized the Apaches had not Major Greer decided to forego his advantage and hold a parley. As it was the Indians had time to take to the rocks. In two charges, says Col. Inman ("Old Santa Fé Trail") more than a hundred Indians were killed or wounded. White Wolf was afterward killed by Lieutenant David Bell of the Second Drgagoons. It was Tom Tobin who killed the noted bandit Espinosa in 1864. Tobin, alone, tracked him into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, found him with one follower, and killed both. Then he cut off their heads and packed them in a gunny-sack to Fort Massachusetts (afterward Fort Garland). Tobin died a natural death shortly after slaying the bandit.—PENDEXTER.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Walter Inland rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

To the Camp-Fire: I had rather travel than do anything else in the world. That seems the shortest self-introduction I can think of for the Camp-Fire. After a boyhood spent in Texas I came to New York and the year before the war I spent in auotmobile travel over Western Europe. In 1915 I was in Serbia with a typhus-fighting unit, and the end of that year—October to January—was taken up with a three hundred and fifty mile retreat on foot with the Serbian armies across the mountains of Montenegro and Albania. July, 1916, found me in Russia as an attaché of the American Embassy, and for eight months I investigated the prison camps and exile villages of Western Siberia, particularly those on the lower stretches of the Ob River which lie some seven hundred miles north of the Trans-Siberian Railway and are reached only by the river. Afterward I went to Vladivostok and north to the cities of the Amur River, where the first Revolution caught me. From there I went into Manchuria and Korea, and spent some months in Japan. Returning to America, I learned to fly—after a poor fashion of my own—in the Royal Flying Corps in Canada, had five crashes and ended in the United States Signal Corps. Early in 1919 I was back in Europe on a mission to get various generals and statesmen to contribute to a history of the war, and since have been engaged in business and writing.

The grittiest sight I ever saw was the Serbian Army, outnumbered six to one, hopelessly outgunned, and starving, fighting their way in good order over the frozen mountains; the most touching sight, thirty thousand Serbian boys between twelve and eighteen, entering the passes of the Albanian Alps in December, from which a week later only six thousand emerged alive; the most impressive, the Victory celebration in Paris on July 14, 1919, when every victorious nation was represented by a veteran regiment moving down the world's most beautiful avenue between banks of German guns, wheel to wheel, six deep and miles long; the keenest thrill I ever had was when I found myself alone for the first time in the air; the best thing I ever did was to get married, and the worst—I sure would hate to print it.—WALTER INLAND.

HERE is something from Arthur O. Friel in connection with his complete novel in this issue. Following it is a brief account of his trip up the Orinoco and Ventuari last year. You may recall I promised to try to get him to tell us all something about that trip, but it wasn't easy to persuade him and I'm just low enough to hand you first of all one of his letters on the subject.

Seriously, I sympathize with him and with the many others of our writers' brigade who squirm and wriggle when it comes their turn to stand up and talk to you about themselves. Most of them make themselves do it, though, and do it for the sake of Camp-Fire. They've enjoyed listening to the other fellows and know it's only fair to buck up and make their own contributions. Mr. Friel, for example, knew you knew he had made that trip and would want to hear something about it from him, just as he would want to hear about interesting trips made by the rest of you. So he comes across:

As for talking about my trip—gee, I dunno. Let me smoke a few cigarets over it before I say aye, yes or no.

In the meantime, take a look at "Black White" and the Camp-Fire dope appended thereto, which goes out to you today. The story itself gives a brief but accurate outline of the main difficulties encountered, and the Camp-Fire sketch gives a few more side-lights. I have left out an awful lot, of course, as I'm trying to tell a story and not write a descriptive article; and on the other hand, I've made reference to one big obstacle which I didn't encounter because it was removed last year—the murder-maniac Tomás Funes, who was killing with both hands in 1916, the time of the story. He was very thoroughly shot on January 30, 1921, and his gang now is scattered to the four winds—though I had one of his ex-killers working for me as a crewman on the Ventuari. I've made *Loco León* mention him because a tale of that country at that time just has to have his name in it somewhere.

Maybe the yarn will give you what you'd like. If not, I'll see what I can do toward uncorking some more dope without seeming to toot my horn too much. It's sort of a hard job because, going alone as I did, I can't say much about my trip without talking a lot about my sawed-off self.

Oh say, before I forget it again: I lost my "71" button down there—it went overboard while I was changing a rain-soaked shirt for a dry one—and I meant to get a new one when I was in the shop the other day, but forgot it. Will you ask the office-boy or somebody to send me one?—FRIEL.

Well up on the Rio Ventuari—just above the thundering cataract of Oso, in fact—in May of this year, 1922, I paused to catch my breath and take stock of my bones after a hair-raising shoot-the-chutes down through rain-swollen *raudales* from the Maquiritare *paragua* of Uaunana. And there I met three Maquiritares with sooty black skins.

Before leaving these three dusky gents the next day in order to buck the raving white-water hell between the falls of Oso and Quencua, I gave their unusual skins a searching once-over and asked how they got that way. The reply caused me forthwith to jot down sundry swift notes in a battered diary, with the added memo: "Adv—Black White." Which, being expanded, meant: "If you live to get out of this, write for *Adventure* a story based on this dope, to be entitled 'Black White.'" And I lived to get out of there, and I've just written the story, and here it is.

THEY told me about the mixture of blood and *yucut' 'sehi*, but would not say that anything else was used. I believe there is something else; what, I don't know, but I doubt if the blood-mixture alone would do it. However, I'm not saying it wouldn't, and I'm not testing it on myself, one way or the other. They also told me the women could, and would—if they took the notion—use it as it is used in this story of mine.

I entered into no argument with them over the possibility of the thing; I had my hands full of more pressing matters, as I had delayed too long in the hills, the rains had caught me, the river was up and growing worse, and I was getting out of there like the proverbial bat out of Gehenna. Neither will I argue about it now. I saw those men with my own two eyes, which are as good as the next man's; I saw that the black was not paint or dirt or tattoo—the Maquiritares never tattoo anyway—but was *in* the skin; I heard their explanation, and know no reason why they should lie about it. And that's that.

AS FOR the Orinoco, the Ventuari and the Indians, they are just as described. Uaunana (pronounced Wah-oo-nah-nah) is at the top of the river, and its chief, Juancito, is a good little skate; when I left there he quietly got into his own *curial* and, with several paddlers, escorted me down to the *raudal* of Monoblanco just to see how I made out. *Loco León* is, like our old friends *Lourenço* and *Pedro* (who now are on a vacation) a composite character; he is made up of two friends of mine down there, one of whom is a blond Spaniard. The man Funes briefly referred to, was a very real and terrible chief cutthroat of an army of cutthroats, who ruled the Orinoco above Atures until last year, when he was shot. Of him, more anon.

A few notes about words:

Piragua and *paragua* look almost the same, but mean widely different things; a *piragua* is a small river-boat, a *paragua* a round Indian tribe-house. Likewise, the Guahibos and the Guaharibos are not at all the same people; the Guahibos are in Colombia south of the river Meta, and a pretty good bunch on the whole, though they have a bad reputation in Venezuela because they kill folks once in a while; the Guaharibos hold the region in which the Orinoco rises, and are absolutely hostile to everybody. The "Rio Negro" of Venezuela is not the big Rio Negro just south, in Brazil, but the black river Atabapo, entering the Orinoco at San Fernando de Atabapo, the only town in the Territorio de Amazonas; because of the fact that the territory is governed—or, rather misgoverned—from this town, the whole Orinoco country above the *raudal* of Atures is loosely called "Rio Negro." San Fernando itself is a "dark and bloody ground," without a doctor or a priest; the last doctor was murdered by Funes' order, and the town has twice been cursed by priests, who predicted that it would end in flames. I got along first-rate with its men during the week I was there—in fact, I hoisted several snorts of *caballo blanco* with a brother of Funes—but I slept with a large six-gun in the hammock every night, just by way of insurance. Yes, it's a sweet little burg. But to get back to my words:

THE correct name of a dugout canoe in Venezuela is *curiara*, but hardly anybody pronounces it that way: folk say "*curial*," so I've used that spelling. Finally, an Indian chief down there is always a *capitán*, not a *jefe* or anything of that sort. The Indians, who were friendly to the first whites until they found themselves being horribly abused, are said to have noticed that the commander of the invaders was called "captain" or *capitán*, so they appropriated the title for their own chiefs.

That's all for this time, except that Maquiritare is pronounced Mah-kee-ri-táh-re.—A. O. F.

P. S.—Brother Hoffman opines that I ought to come across with some more dope about my recent little pasear up the Orinoco and Ventuari. All right. Here comes an earful:

IN THE first place, I usually travel without partners. In that way I don't have to argue with any side-kick about what shall be done next. Also, if I get into a jam I don't have to feel that I dragged a buddy into it. I can hop into any danged thing I like, get out of it any way I can, and not give a raing-tailed whoop about anybody else. Which comes pretty close to being freedom.

To show how this works out—I started for British Guiana; changed my mind and flopped over into Venezuela; decided to go up the Orinoco to the Padamo; learned that the Ventuari was a tougher proposition, and went bustling up the Ventuari and got into the "unknown land." Now if I'd been hooked up with one of those schedule-hounds who pride themselves on having "single-track minds," where would I have wound up? I dunno. There'd have been a row, anyway.

RIGHT here I ought to say that I played in great luck all through this trip. Otherwise my bones probably would now be somewhere along the Orinoco, which is one wicked river to go skating on. Luck began at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, where I wandered into the American consulate to get an official O.K. on a certain document and found in Captain Alberto Demorest (the *vice*-consul) a loyal Camp-Fire comrade and a royal good scout. Through him I soon met the Venezuelan and Colombian consuls-general, Señores Quintero and Molano, who are good sports; and when I departed up the Orinoco I carried notes of introduction from both Demorest and Quintero which went far to make me welcome in Venezuela. You fellows who have knocked around in the tropics know how valuable such things are. Venezuela likes Americans, if they're of the right sort; but in view of the fact that she's a hair-trigger country and that certain misguided outsiders have kicked up considerable trouble there at times, she naturally wants to know who her visitors are.

Reaching Ciudad Bolívar is easy enough; nothing to it but traveling a couple of hundred miles upriver on the old stern-wheeler *Delta*, which steams from Trinidad every now and then. Ciudad Bolívar is the metropolis of the Orinoco—in fact, the only place of any importance on the whole river—and is the capital of Bolívar state, governed at present by General Vincencio Perez-Soto. The general is a regular fellow, a good sport, and a man of his word, and he sure treated me right. The law of Venezuela has recently been made very tight, however, about bringing in arms, and nobody south of Caracas could release my guns from the clutches of the *aduana;* so I had to hang up in Bolívar until President Gomez wired the necessary order.

IN THE dry season, Ciudad Bolívar is the end of steamer navigation. The rocks up above have smashed several steamers which took a chance in other years, and now the only way to travel farther in low-water time is by an infrequent *piragua*. After some dickering I got transportation for myself and a Trinidad nigger (no, not "negro"—he was a *nigger*, and the last of his breed who will ever draw pay from me) on a 45-foot *piragua* bound for the *raudal* of Atures, some 400 miles farther upriver, where the Territorio de Amazonas begins. On this patch-sailed, ramshackle craft, in company with nineteen natives who were going after tonca-beans, we bumped along over the sandbars for a couple of weeks; got through the smaller *raudales* mostly by fool luck; and ended our sailing at Zamuro, a mosquito-swarming rock-hole hotter than the hinges of Hades—a "port" with a name but no houses. The name means "vulture."

HERE I took four of the boat's crew as my own men, said *adios* to the rest of the gang, and tackled the overland trip around the *raudal*. I'd been sizing up my men ever since leaving Ciudad Bolívar, because one of the biggest dangers confronting the lone white wanderer down South is that of being done in by his own crew. More than one *gringo* has cashed in by that route. By the way, does anybody know of a chap named Crystal, who was either American or English, and who disappeared in Colombia about 1915? A Venezuelan with whom I talked at the Rio Catañapo (a little above Atures) told me Crystal was robbed and deserted by his crew on the river Meta; was later picked up by a down-bound bunch of Colombians; but died from the effects of his privations and lies buried on the Isla de Muerte, in the Meta, not far from the Orinoco. If any of our crowd knew him and has been wondering what became of him, that's where he is.

Anyway, I got four mighty good men: faithful, honest, hard-working, good-natured Venezuelan rivermen who carried on with never a whine, though tortured from dawn to dark by millions of those damnable little Orinoco mosquitoes which bite like red-hot needles. I'd like to see certain loud-mouthed "white men" whom I've heard sneering at South American "spiggoties" stand up under the gaff those fellows took. Their skins were yellow, but there was no yellow in their blood. On general principles, I kept an eye peeled and the old Colt handy (without letting them know it), but I never needed a gun for those four fellows.

WELL, after some delay at Atures I fell in with an armed gang from San Fernando de Atabapo who had come down to ship out some balata and were going back, and on their *piragua* we poled up through more *raudales* to Maipures. The San Fernando bunch were good skates, and we got along fine together. This part of the river (from the Meta south nearly to San Fernando) is Guahibo Indian ground and, since the Guahibos have a bad name for killing travelers, we used to sleep on our guns on big rocks where nothing could sneak up on us unseen in the night. Met some Guahibos at Maipures, but they were feeling good-natured and we were heavily gunned, so all went well. The Guahibos never had seen a *Norte Americano*, and they surrounded me and pawed me over and took stuff out of my pockets—and put back every danged thing after they looked at it, too. I gave their medicine-man a little box of smoker's matches, and he thought I was a prince. Me, I liked the Guahibos fine, and—although I now own a couple of the bloodstained hardwood clubs with which they killed a Venezuelan trader awhile ago—I hope to see more of them sometime.

Got a *piragua* of my own above Maipures and poled along to San Fernando de Atabapo. Had an interesting week there—made more interesting by a secret warning to eat no food not prepared by my own men, as the idea had spread around that I was packing a trunkful of gold coin—and then, having obtained a thirty-foot *curial*, went on. The *curial*, by the way, was Funes' former disptach-boat, in which many a murder-message had gone to his cut-throat gangs, and was black as the Jolly Roger. All kinds of boats are scarce as hens' teeth on the upper river just now, as the revolutionists who bumped off Funes carried downstream with them everything that would float. It was just by luck and by being a good fellow with the gang that I got hold of the Funes death-boat. It was by far the best *curial* I saw anywhere on the Venezuelan rivers.

AND so I reached the Ventuari. Went up to see what I might see, and saw quite a lot. Among other things, I met the Ventuar half of *Loco León*—the other half of this fiction character lives on another tributary of the Orinoco, and neither of the two men is named León or anything like it. A couple of days below Quencua I had shot a tapir for meat (tough brutes to kill, by the way) and made camp for the rest of the day in order to barbecue the critter in Indian style—only way to keep the meat without salt. At dark, in came a *curial* from up-river, carrying a couple of Indians and *Loco*, who was down-bound and had seen my fire. He had a little roasting of his own to do, as he had shot three peccaries. So, while his Indians and my Venezuelans tended their respective fires, *Loco* and I smoked my *cigarrillos*, punished a quart of *ron anciado* which I dug up for the occasion, and talked late. The upshot of the talk was that the next day he turned back upstream, went ahead of me (he was riding light, while I was loaded with six men's supplies and necessary equipment) and, at his *sitio* below Quencua, organized the few men he had on hand to help me along up the river. Without them I never should have made it. And I defy any other stranger to go up that river and come back alive without such aid. My nigger man spoke one true sentence on that stream—he called the river above Quencua "hell and damnation." It is exactly that.

LOCO LEÓN, as I call him here, works the balata on the Ventuari and is the only man who can—the only man for whom the Ventuari Indians will do such work. In the dry time he scouts for new districts. He has made a couple of tidy little fortunes, lost them through the curse of Venezuela (revolutions), and now is once more on the up-grade. He is as square as a brick and as game as they make 'em, and I'm proud to call him *compañero*.

Loco himself went with me to the cataract of Oso—which means "ant-bear" down here, and is so named because, like the ant-bear which drives its huge hooks into the heart of the *tigre* and never lets go, this waterfall never gives up its dead. Must be a subterranean hole of some sort below it; anyway, a man who goes in there never comes up. Farther than this *Loco* could not go, as he was all in from fever at the time. But he gave me two daredevil men of his who knew the river up to the first Maquiritare house, and, after firing three of my Orinoco boys who had gone about as far as they wanted to, I rambled on in a new *curial*.

The two new men were both Venezuelans, one being a handsome dog who had been one of the executioners in Funes' "army." He spoke in the most casual way of having beheaded men with a machete, and was equally unconcerned about his own life as we bucked the dangers of the river. We fought our way up through one mean *raudal* after another, and eventually reached the Maquiritares. I got four husky young bucks to go along with us, and after a lot more rough stuff we arrived at Uaunana.

THERE the rains hit us. I wasn't satisfied yet—wanted to go on over the divide and down the Caura. But by now my men were at the end of their rope, I was about done up myself, and the Maquiritares said the overland traverse could be made only in the dry season, which now was past. When it rains in the Parimas it rains buckets, and it keeps on raining. So, when I had visited the Uaunanans a while, I had to go back down the Ventuari. Ought to have started the return trip sooner than I did. When I finally got under way the river was the finest death-trap I ever clapped an eye on, and I don't know yet just how we got out alive, except that it was by marvels of paddle-work and miracles of luck. Old Man Death snatched at us a hundred times, but somehow we always dodged.

Below Quencua it wasn't so bad, and from there on it was "three men in a boat"—one Venezuelan, as *popero* (steersman); one Trinidad nigger, as *boga* (paddler) and cook; one Yank, as *proero* (bowman) and *capitán*—all the way to Bolívar.

We had many a stiff fight with the Orinoco waves, which are big and nasty for a little *curial* to buck against, and sundry disagreements with crocs which plunged off the bank at us, under the impression that we were eatable. We also paddled through a new revolution which had busted loose since we passed up the river—they looted several towns and at one of them there was a scrap in which 82 men were killed and 107 wounded; and they shot up boats and had a perfectly lovely time. We also heard that a broken-down outlaw leader with whom I had been a bit short on my way upstream (he traveled on the Zamuro-bound *piragua* a few days) had now collected a gang and would be pleased to shoot the guts out of a certain roving Yank. But we rambled right along with paddles thumping out the same old *curial* tune, dodging nobody and turning out for nothing; and the revolutionists happened to be revoluting up north at the moment, and the gent thirsting for my gore was probably playing jackal and hanging around the real fighters looking for pickings—he was of that type—and so there was nothing for me to fight with but the river, which sure gave me a bellyful.

BY THE time I reached Bolívar I was an official dispatch-bearer for the Venezuelan Government, having taken aboard certain messages at the little town of Las Bonitas, where a federal garrison hung out; which may have made me unneutral, but since the federals had shown me every courtesy and their messages were directed to friend General Perez-Soto, neutrality could go hang.

The Ciudad Bolívar folks seemed surprized by my return. They told me I wasn't expected back, because of every five men to go to the upper Orinoco only two live to make the round trip. As for the Ventuari, there are no figures—folks don't go there. So far as I could learn, I was the first foreigner ever to go up to Uaunana, at least since the days of the Conquistadores. There is said to have been a chain of Spanish blockhouses from the Caura to the Padamo some hundreds of years ago, the entire works finally disappearing one fine night when the Maquiritares, who had tired of Spaniards, annihilated the garrisons and burned their forts. Mebbe so. The Maquiritares could do it, all right.

IN MODERN times the only white traveler known to have been on the Ventuari was a European (not English) explorer who came *down* the *lower part* of it a few years back—shortly before Germany started to try to lick the world. Since my return I have seen a book written by this gent, purporting to show his explorations; and though I don't happen to read his language, I note that his map credits him with traveling down the entire Ventuari, from source to mouth. Which is great stuff, except that *Loco León* says he did nothing of the kind. According to *Loco* (who knows from his Indian friends just what this bird did) the explorer came into Venezuela via the Amazon, Negro Branco and Uraricoera (also called Parima); tried to go down the Padamo, but got chased toward the Ventuari by the Guaharibos; entered the Ventuari by way of the Rio Hacha (a side river about halfway down) and scooted down to *Loco's sitio;* arrived there almost naked, but bringing army trunks full of soils, seeds, etc., to be shipped to and studied by the scientists of his fatherland; stayed a month eating *Loco's* grub and getting new clothes made—and then left in a towering rage because *Loco* declined to take money for his hospitality. I give you gentlemen one guess as to the nationality of this traveler.

Me, I make no claims to being an explorer; I'm only a wandering jassack who goes around to look at things. So it's nothing to me whether this fellow saw all the Ventuari or not. He had a tough trip anyway, and I danged well know it; so we'll let it go at that.

LITTLE old Venezuela is a wonderland for the adventurer who goes out to see what he may see. Unclimbed mountains, unexplored rivers, unknown tribes—they're all there, and then some. The sources of the Orinoco itself never have been discovered yet, thanks to the savage Guaharibos. But the back bush of Venezuela is no pleasure resort, and the chap who bucks it can expect to be up against the real thing, and up against it good and plenty. As soon as he gets away from the cities it's mostly luck, and if the luck turns bad—may God have mercy on his soul!

Well, this was to be only a postscript, and now it's so much bigger than the first note that the tail is wagging the dog. However, I'll let 'er wag. And before I shut up I want to add this: that though I kept my letters of introduction and my Colt out of sight after leaving Ciudad Bolívar (I don't believe in flashing either of them unless they've got to be used) I met courtesy and real goodfellowship all along the line. Men heard I was a *Norte Americano*, looked me in the eye, and were friendly. I didn't hear the word *gringo* once; it was always *el señor;* and I was a tough-looking bird much of the time, especially on the way back. I believe there is a very real and strong friendship for the United States of America in the Estados Unidos de Venezuela, and that the Yank who knows how to meet and treat the Venezolanos will always find a welcome among them. The other kind of "American"—the loud-mouthed, sneering, domineering ass—had better stay here in the States. He won't get along well down there, and he's a rotten poor advertisement for the U. S. A. in any part of the world.—A. O. F.

SOMETHING from John Webb about his story in this issue—or rather about *One-Two Mac:*

There are some who might deem *One-Two Mac* an impossible character, but I assure you he is not. He is a man whom I have taken from real life, given a fictitious name, and written my stories around. He is at present master of a passenger ship in the Central American trade. I sailed with him as second mate for two years and a half and he had all the fighting qualities of the master of the *Hawk*. He was a stormy petrel; not a trouble-seeker but a man who would not side-step the biggest and roughest of forecastle bullies. I was of some assistance to him in several little affairs and we became fast friends. Not that he would ever admit it, he said that he had no friends and needed none, but beneath his hard, snarly shell I always thought I could detect something that belied his words and manner.

He delighted in under-handed kindnesses, and then would snarl and snap so as not to be suspected of them. I am going to tell more about the little man and will do my best to make each story better than the one before.

Again thanking you, and hoping for a long and friendly acquaintance with Camp-Fire, I am—JOHN WEBB.

THE following was really a personal letter to me accompanying the MS. of Arthur G. Brodeur's story in this issue, but I know he won't mind my passing it on to you with that explanation:

Berkeley, Calif.

While I was actually at work on my attempt to drive through the Faidit novel, the plot for "The Honor of a King" struck me between the eyes and I couldn't do anything else till I'd written the story. It certainly gave me more pleasure than anything else I've done, but there's no accounting for tastes. The basic fact is that I had no option but to write it. It occupied my mind to the exclusion of all other story-material.

THE subject-matter is an old Teutonic legend which was worked up in two different Anglo-Saxon poems: in the "Beowulf," where it is brought in as an episode; and in the so-called "Fight at Finnsburg," a fragment of forty-odd lines. The latter appears to have been originally an epic poem on the struggle between the Danes and the Jutes and Frisians; all that is left of it is a vivid battle-scene. All the motivation and characterization in my story is developed from hints contained in the "Beowulf," which does suggest the moral problem involved and Hengist's struggle to determine the manly course of action.

My story is as true to the legend as is possible in view of the fact that the Anglo-Saxon texts are somewhat obscure. Where there is dispute as to the details of the action I have followed Raymond Chambers' views (See his "Beowulf: an Introduction," Cambridge Univ. Press, 1921)—for example, I follow him in his conception of the part played by the Jutes. The legend is probably pretty straight history, naturally with such changes as are inevitable in the course of one or two centuries of oral transmission among the folk.

PERSONALLY I think the subject matter is darned fine: the faults of the story as I have written it are all due to my own lack of skill. I have tried to render the point of view of the characters—a point of view essentially different from our own, and hence hard to get across to modern readers. I think we ought to know more about our ancestors of the fifth century—the period when the English were actually engaged in invading and colonizing England. Most of us know mighty little either of their history or of their way of looking at things. Yet it would be pretty valuable to know what our ancestors were like.—ARTHUR G. BRODEUR.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue, a few words from William Byron Mowery. He needn't refrain from that epithet for Labrador just because it's cold there; the old Irish conception of hell was not a hot but a very cold place.

Old Jacques Cartier, who saw some desolate countries in his roving days, said back in 1534 that Labrador is the land which God gave Cain, and that he didn't find a cartload of dirt along the whole north coast. Another version to account for the vast uplands of rock swells is that the Creator spent the Seventh day throwing stones at Labrador. Both accounts may be correct, if we take the second one first. One thing is certain, the ordinary chap would be "shaking hands with the willows" after about ten months among the pink granite swells of the hinterland. Gray skies, gray boulders, keen squalls and sleety showers down from Chidley, scrubby deer bush where there's any soil, otherwise gray Laurentian rock scraped clean from the last glacial retreat—this last of the fur countries *is* the Land of Cain. If the mercury didn't stay out of sight so much in Winter time, I'd say it is a —— of a place.

BUT then, suddenly—rarely enough to make you remember it—you come across a little blue lake with tall spruce around it like the lashes around the eye of a lass; where the big namaycush wallow in the water like fat shoats and the gamey fontenalis fight for the fly. Or across the mile-wide, dusty path of caribou *en traverse*. Or high terraces where the blueberries make slippery walking.

A glimpse of the hinterland west from Okkak put the idea of "A Cain of the Uplands" in my head. If any Adventurer who has seen that country knows any spot on the Footstool to equal it, I'd like to hear about it. Stories there? It's a race of *men* that live along *that* 'Starvation Coast"—most of them with Mac in front of their names, but some of the sons of Radisson and Iberville and Groseillers, too.—WM. BYRON MOWERY.

DON'T forget that we are selling our cover originals by a new system. Covers will be auctioned by mail as heretofore, but instead of holding all bids until the end of the year, we shall send each cover to the highest bidder one month after the issue of the magazine bearing that cover has appeared on the news-stands. Thus bidding on the cover of the September 10th issue, out August 10th, will be closed September 10th. Minimum bid, ten dollars. All covers will be sent to the highest bidders express collect. In case two or more bidders offer the same amount for one cover it will go to the bid first received.—A. S. H.

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H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

49. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

50. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

51. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
Otto M. Jones, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached*)

52. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

53. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

57. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

58. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston Mass. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

Major W. G. Schauffler, Jr., General Airways System, Inc., Duryea Bldg., Connecticut Ave. at L. St., Washington, D. C. Airplanes: airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical, laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle Association of America,** Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver Ass'n.** W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

A Gun-Collectors' Association

HERE'S your chance to get in on the ground floor:

Question:—"I gain your address from *Adventure,* in which I have read an answer to an inquiry about Probin pistols.

It has occurred to me that you might be interested in benefiting your magazine by falling in with a suggestion which I made to Mr. Charles Winthrop Sawyer some time ago, but which he regarded as impracticable because he felt that a large paid organization was necessary in order to carry out the idea which I had in mind, and this I could not fall in with.

The idea was this: That there should be a sort of informal association between gun-collectors of this country, at least to the extent of each becoming acquainted with the address of the others and the character of the weapons which the others were parparticularly interested in, and possibly with an idea of interchanging lists of the collections and information respecting the subjects which the collection of a particular collector would indicate.

I am a collector of shotguns of the late flint-lock and percussion period. I note that you cover the flint-lock period. That Mr. J. B. Thompson covers all shotguns. I fear, however, that this means shotguns of the present date. That Mr. Donegan Wiggins, of Salem, Ore., covers all rifles, pistols, and revolvers.

It occurs to me that an association such as I have suggested might eventually develop into a department of *Adventure* magazine, since the collection of arms is an adventure open to all of us regardless of age and infirmity. If you think well of the plan I would be glad to hear from you. I enclose stamp for reply.

There is a subject in which I am much interested as to which you may be able to help me. I have an idea that all of the great London gunmakers of the late flint-lock and percussion era were descendants in craftsmanship of a comparatively few, maybe only one or two, gunmakers of the middle of the eighteenth century.

I have found that John Manton, Joseph's brother, was an apprentice of Twigg, a London gunmaker, who flourished in the eighteenth century. It is possible that Joseph Manton might have served his apprenticeship in the same shop, since the work of Joseph and John was believed by many to be of equal worth. My incomplete information would indicate that Egg, Mortimer, Nock and Manton were the several stocks from which practically all the English gunmakers of today came from. I would like to carry this history of the stock back further.

I think we will find that one branch of this will be found in D. Egg, the progenitor of Durs Egg. Twigg may be another, and some other unknown may be another. If my deductions upon incomplete information are correct it would be most interesting to show that in the reincarnation of these long-dead gunmakers the lesson that they taught of doing the best possible work is the distinguishing quality of their descendants in craftsmanship.

Any information you may have along this line would be greatly appreciated. I am sending a copy of this letter to both of the representatives of *Adventure* whose names I have given above, in the hope that they will find it possible to enlighten me, and that all three of you may regard the modest scheme of mine as possibly workable.

A great value to collectors which I might point out would be that when collectors know each other they will know where a market is to be found for their collection when necessity or death requires its disposal, and the market so found would be one which would appreciate, not merely the money value of the subjects of collection but of the thought and study and love that went into its formation."—R. G. BICKFORD, Newport News, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—Pray pardon my delay in replying to your letter, as I have been laid up in bed with grippe.

I doubt if the magazine would consider the subject of weapons of sufficient importance to do any more than it is doing. This suggestion—or some of a similar nature—has been put up to me several times, and I have talked it over with Sawyer. Neither of us would have the time to take a directing part in such a matter, I being like yourself, an attorney in my twenty-fifth year of active practise.

As a matter of fact, my collection and my interest cover all periods from the hand cannon to date. John Manton was at one time foreman for Twigg. I do not think Joseph Manton was ever connected with the latter. I should imagine that you would get more information along the line you speak of from Major Pollard of London than from any other. He is on the ground, where inquiries as to such matters could be more easily made.

I think you would be repaid to write to Mr. F. Theodore Dexter, 802 E. Boone St., Marshalltown, Iowa. He is even now engaged in getting up some such association as you suggest and a magazine. Together with some others, I have promised him my support. I know he will be pleased to hear from you.

I will endeavor to have this letter published, so that others may know of this proposition and communicate with Mr. Dexter.

The full statement of the sections in this department, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Canoeing, Livingston, Mont., to St. Louis

A THIRTY-FIVE-HUNDRED-mile trip down the rapid-flowing Yellowstone, accompanied by historic shades of the old West:

Question:—Upon my return to the States I am planning on taking a canoe-trip down the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers with a friend and with this in view I ask you the following questions.

Do you consider the Yellowstone River navigable with a canoe from Livingston, Mont., to the Missouri and the Missouri to St. Louis during the Fall of the year?

About how long do you think it would take to make the trip from Yellowstone to St. Louis in a canoe at an easy, pleasure-going pace, only stopping for camping at night and an occasional day here and there in the larger towns?

What type and make of canoe is preferable for this rough river work? Any suggestions regarding the particular equipment adaptable for the Yellowstone trip would be very acceptable.

About how many portages would be required down the Yellowstone, and are there any unusual obstacles in the way of a trip of this kind?

Is there any first-class sporting-goods store in Livingston, Mont.?

If you can supply maps or charts of the Yellowstone River I will be pleased to remit checks for same; or if this is inconvenient kindly put me in touch with a firm who can supply these."—RUSSELL F. VOELKER, Singapore, S. S.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—The navigability of the Yellowstone River from Livingston to the Missouri and the Missouri to St. Louis with a canoe in the Fall of the year depends but little upon the rivers and a great deal upon the navigators. If you and your friend are skilful canoeists, accustomed to white water, and can keep cool and steady when you hit the rapids, you should have a most pleasurable trip, but if you can't meet these qualifications —keep off the Yellowstone. In the Fall of the year especially when the water is low and the rapids more menacing tyros have no business on it.

The Yellowstone from Livingston on its course of 644 miles to its confluence with the Missouri drops 2,000 feet along a gravel bottom that is interspersed with many dangerous rock reefs. There is a strong undercurrent which nearly always claims for its own those who are so unfortunate as to fall in the river. It is a safe assertion, I believe, that the Yellowstone takes more victims each season than do all of Montana's other rivers combined.

It is approximately 2,500 miles from Livingston to St. Louis by river. You ought to make the trip easily in two months.

To get the most out of it, however, please—for the sake of the old West—revise that part of your program that contemplates "only stopping for camping at night and an occasional day here and there in the larger towns." Map out your itinerary in advance, and mayhap when you tie up for the night the shades of old-time fur-traders, of forgotten explorers and of the gallant Custer and his band will silently slip forth from the willow brush and the cottonwood groves to have speech with thee around the camp-fire, of days that are dead and gone.

The shade of Captain William Clark, who made this same trip in 1806, might respond to a friendly summons from the relighted embers of his old camps. Surely John Colter, who in 1807, escaping stark naked from an encounter with the Blackfeet on the Jefferson and subsisting only on roots, made his way overland—discovering the Yellowstone Park *en route*—in seven days to the Manuel Lisa trading-post at the mouth of the Big Horn—surely his spirit will fraternize with a friendly soul encamped along the stream that he reached in safety.

The dream of empire conceived by Manuel Lisa flickered out at the mouth of the Big Horn, but was revived with the establishment there in 1875 of Fort Pease, considered the head of navigation on the Yellowstone and designed to wrest from Fort Benton the rich trade of the gold-mines. No sooner was the post built than it was invested by the Sioux. Many an Indian fell before the rifles of the garrison, but the siege, continued. Six of the garrison were killed and nine wounded.

Day after day passed, and the Sioux forces steadily increased. Total annihilation stared the garrison of twenty-five in the face. In late Winter one of their number volunteered to attempt the delivery of an appeal to Fort Ellis, 175 miles away, up the Yellowstone and over the Bridger Range.

Weary days passed. Finally one day in March four troops of cavalry appeared, and the Indians fled.

The second dream of empire was laid low, and now a third has arisen, founded on sugar-beets, oil and hydro-electric power.

Where the Rosebud empties into the Yellowstone tarry a bit. The waters that go purling by today at the same spot gently lapped the old Far West on the night of June 21, 1876, when Generals Custer, Terry and Gibbon held the memorable council of war that sealed the fate of Custer, but broke the power of the Sioux nation and ended the Indian warfare that John Colter had begun in 1807 when he shot a Crow brave.

The council of war ended, and in the cabin of the Far West began a poker game—one of the stiffest ever played on the river according to Captain Grant Marsh, participated in by Captain Tom Custer and others whose names are inscribed on the monument of the Battle of the Big Horn. It was here the following morning that soldiers of Custer's command penned their farewell letters and at noon rode out of camp to their death. Immediately after the column started the letters were placed in a mail-sack to be conveyed to Fort Buford by three soldiers in a skiff. Before the skiff had gone fifty feet it was overturned in the swift current and its occupants were drowned. Boat-hooks rescued the precious mail-pouch.

Every mile of the Yellowstone, and of the Missouri as well, teems with romance. That of the Yellowstone, for some strange reason, never seems to have attracted attention. It is a virgin field, rich in historical associations and the adventures of real he-men, but to get the most out of such a trip as you contemplate a perspective of the past is needed.

Lewis R. Freeman made this trip in 1921 in a light steel skiff that weighed 150 pounds. It had but two inches free-board; he says four would be better. The only portage he made was at Intake, Richland County, Mont., where a dam was built in connection with the Lower Yellowstone project of the U. S. Reclamation Service. There are good sporting-goods stores in Livingston, but your boat would have to be purchased in the East.

I do not know where a chart of the Yellowstone River is obtainable unless it be from the Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, Washington, D. C.

The latest book available on this trip is "Down the Yellowstone" by Lewis R. Freeman, Dodd, Mead & Company, price $3.50. You also should read: "The Conquest of the Missouri" by Joseph Mills Hanson, A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago. More than half of this book is devoted to the Yellowstone. Also a book on the Lewis and Clark expedition, 1804-1806, and if available Lieutenant Bradley's Journal in Volume Two of "Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana."

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Düsseldorf

IF YOU'RE French, keep it quiet:

Question:—"Since my release from naval service after the war I find it difficult for my wife and myself to get along comfortably on our fixed income of two hundred dollars per month. As we are getting older we are thinking seriously of going to Europe to live. Both of us speak French. I understand that it is possible to live very well in certain parts of Germany and on a limited income, and I am writing to get your kind advice regarding living costs in the western part of Germany, also if it is necessary for one to be able to speak German.

Will you please suggest the best cities or towns to go to, giving the names—and prices—of such *pensions* or boarding-houses in the different towns as you would recommend.

We are much inclined to like German people and if it is feasible would remain a long time in Germany.

Can you tell me what German steamship lines are now running to their home ports?

If you can not give me this information personally, will you kindly inform me of the best way to get it?

I enclose envelop and stamp for reply and request that my name be not published."— ——— ——, San Diego, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—As you prefer the western part of Germany I would suggest Düsseldorf (which is in the occupied zone) or Mannheim. There are, however, smaller cities and towns along the eastern bank of the Rhine where living would be much cheaper than in larger cities.

It is impossible for me to advise you at which *pensions*—boarding-houses in English—you should live. The hotel rates are according to demands you make, and there are not many *pensions* in the French sense of the word. I would suggest that you write to the U. S. consular agent at Cologne for more detailed information.

With your fixed income of two hundred dollars per month you could live very comfortably and save money besides.

If I were in your place, I'd settle, after preliminary examination of the territory (I would suggest that you start at Cologne and go down the Rhine) in a town of about five thousand people. You could make arrangements to board with a small family of the middle class who would be only too glad to accommodate you. Your board money would enable them to provide you with all you want, and you know that the Germans are good cooks. There is plenty of good wine to be had at a moderate cost.

The climate in the so-called Pfalz (the Palatinate) is very pleasant all the year round; the country is healthy and lacks nothing in natural beauty.

Ignorance of the German language would be somewhat of a handicap, but most people do speak French. I must point out to you that it would be a good idea to state you are not a Frenchman, because the Germans certainly do not love the French.

The Hamburg-American Line as well as the North German Lloyd run ships directly from New York to Bremen and Hamburg. Their vessels are operated in conjunction with the United American Lines, 39 Broadway, and the United States Lines, 45 Broadway, of this city. Address them for information.

It is impossible to give you correct data as to living costs, due to the constant fluctation of exchange. The lower the mark goes the higher the living expenses. The dollar buys a lot though.

If I can be of more service, please command me.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

The Elbow Lake District

WELL mineralized, *and* undeveloped. Looks like a chance for some one with money:

Question:—"Will you kindly give me some information regarding the Elbow Lake district? Is there still any opportunity to take up a claim in that section? Has the camp been established long enough to make it worth while to look for other work during the Winter, and what class of work is most in demand?

Am a mechanic, but have spent most of my time in the open and am acquainted with the conditions in the mountains here. Knowing, however, that the conditions there must be totally different, rather than ask a lot of specific questions that would probably have no bearing on the matter I am going to ask for a line of general information and leave the matter to you. I would like to know what equipment would be the most satisfactory.

I would request that you do not use my name." — ——— ——, New Florence, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—The immediate vicinity of Elbow Lake is fairly well staked up just at present, but there is other good prospecting-ground in the locality. Several large companies are at present carrying on exploration work in northern Manitoba, but there are no producing mines at present. The district is in the prospecting and examination stage, and it may be some time before actual production commences.

While there is no doubt as to the merits of many properties there are questions such as transportation, construction of railways and mining costs to be considered.

The prospecting season will be over for six months by next October, as nothing can be done in the way of making new finds in the Winter with three or four feet of snow on the ground.

For a man with sufficient money for a grubstake there is no better prospecting field in Canada than northern Manitoba. There is no placer-mining, but all kinds of gold in place and copper, lead and other metals. However, once a man makes a good strike it may be some time before he can interest capital and get the necessary money to develop his property. I meet practically every mining engineer who comes into the district, and they all seem very much impressed. Some of the largest companies on the continent have interests in the district and should start operations soon.

The principal method of traveling is by canoe in the Summer and dog-team in the Winter. The whole countryside is a network of lakes.

There is an abundance of game, and the game-laws north o' 53 permit prospectors, trappers, etc., to shoot anything for their own use at any season of the year.

The best time to come north is in the early Spring, say the beginning of May. An outfit can be sesured at The Pas at one of the numerous stores which specialize in these matters. It would comprise canoe, prospecting-tools, flour, tea, bacon, etc., and a man could then remain out skirting the country until the middle of October. During the heat of the Summer the flies are very bad, but in the Spring and Fall they do not worry one.

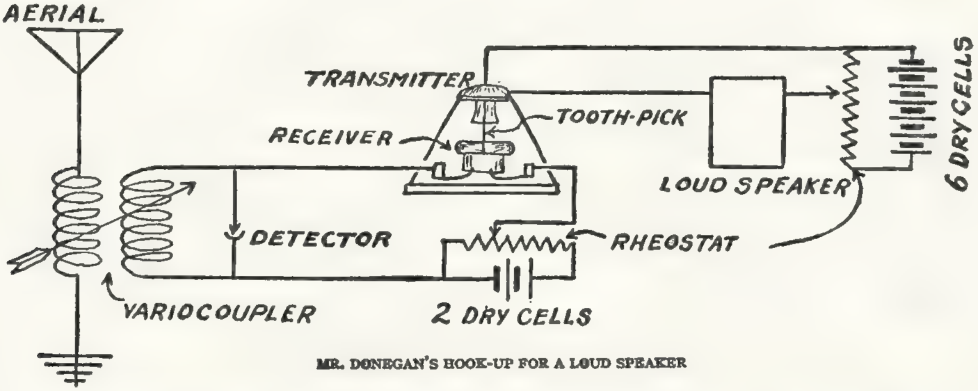
Would advise writing the Department of the Interior, Ottawa, for booklets and general information on northern Manitoba. These will be forwarded free of charge.

If later on you desire additional information I'll be pleased to hear from you; and if you drift up to the Pas look me up.

A Crystal Set for Radio

THIS is all Choctaw to me, but I know there are a lot of radio fans among us who will be glad of the information:

Question:—"Would like to ask you a few questions in regard to enclosed hook-up.



MR. DONEGAN'S HOOK-UP FOR A LOUD SPEAKER

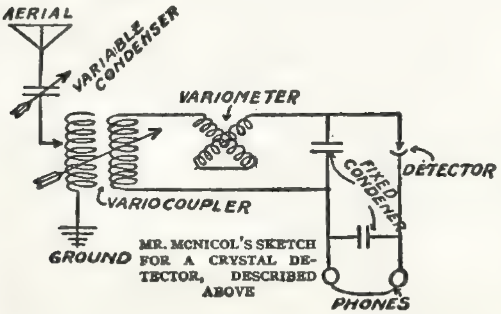
1. What kind of plates should be used in detector? How should they be placed as to pos. and neg.?
2. Would a Baldwin C phone do as a transmitter?
3. Would such a hook-up work with a loud speaker for local receiving only?"—Wm. H. Donegan, Cleveland, O.

Answer, by Mr. McNicol:—The sketch you forward evidently contemplates the use of an electrolytic detector and a mechanical amplifier.

In the first place an electrolytic detector is a messy and unreliable device. A galena crystal is simpler and more dependable. The toothpick receiver-microphone amplifier you illustrate might work if properly designed, but an ordinary microphone with solid carbon button would not do. The Baldwin C phone would do as a receiver but not as a transmitter.

I think you would be further ahead if you aimed to make up a tube set, using a peanut dry-cell tube as a detector. If you desire loud-speaking service a similar dry-cell tube set could be connected with the detector unit, thence to a horn device.

The sketch given herewith is for a good crystal-set arrangement.



MR. MCNICOL'S SKETCH FOR A CRYSTAL DETECTOR, DESCRIBED ABOVE

The Spencer Rifle

FIRST repeating rifle used by the U. S. Army:

Question:—"A short time ago while helping some friends go through the effects of their father, who was a Civil War veteran, we came across a Spencer rifle.

On the lock-plate was engraved—"Spencer Arms Co., Boston 1860." When the wrapping was taken off a piece of paper rolled out which had the following written on it—

"After the Battle of Gettysburg on the march from Brandy Station to Warrenton Junction, I took this rifle from a wounded Confederate."

Can you tell me to what extent the Spencer rifle was used in the Civil War?

Was Berdan's brigade of sharpshooters equipped with this arm?

How it came into possession of one of the rebs can of course only be surmised.

My friend bequeathed it to the Vermont Historical Society."—John G. Weld, Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The Spencer repeating rifle, the invention of Christopher Minor Spencer, was patented March 6, 1860, and the Union Government at the instance of President Lincoln purchased 94,156 of them to arm troops with during the war, both full-length infantry arms and the cavalry carbine, principally the latter. They were the first repeating arm except revolvers adopted by our Government, as far as I am able to ascertain.

They were used by the Union forces principally from 1863 onward to the end of the war, which doubtless explains the possession by a Confederate of one. He doubtless took it from a dead or captured Union soldier.

The Spencers were used till 1877 as far as I can learn, then being replaced by the Springfield carbines in the cavalry, the infantry having used the Allen alteration of the muzzle-loading Springfield since 1866 or thereabout. The Spencers gave great trouble in the extraction of fired cartridges; if the cases were dirty or too greasy they were apt to stick in the breech and required the aid of knife or rod to remove them.

Of course when the Sioux and Cheyennes were "on the peck" this was apt to prove very inconvenient. General Godfrey, who commanded a company of the Seventh Cavalry under Custer at the Little Big Horn affair, lays part of the blame for the disaster to the failure of the Spencer carbines of Custer's men to extract the empty shells, thus allowing the Indians to have a great advantage with their Winchester, Henry and Springfield rifles, furnished them in the case of the two former by the traders, and the Springfields being given them by the Interior Department "that they might secure game to live on." They certainly got the game.

Spencers are getting rare today, and I congratulate you on the find of the relic. I am glad it is to be suitably preserved as well.

Berdan's sharpshooters were armed with heavy, single-shot, muzzle-loading rifles, not with the short-range Spencers.

Guam

WHY Magellan's men called the group to which it belonged, "Islas de los Ladrones:"

Question:—"Last Summer I spent on Guam, aboard the U. S. S. *Celtic*. While there I heard some fragments of the history of that island, which, although I do not clearly remember, I am inclined to believe to a certain extent.

About 1900, I think it was, a severe typhoon visited the island. It is said the seas broke over the entire island, which is quite improbable considering the height of the land in the center. Is this true?

You know what a narrow entrance the harbor has. Well, it is said that at the time there was a ship in the harbor. This ship, it seems, was torn from its moorings and carried safely out to sea.

Some say it went out through the narrow entrance of the harbor, others that it was carried over the coral reefs by the enormity of the waves. It was in all probability carried to sea; but, I won't believe, safely. If this is true would you tell me the name and type of the vessel and whether or not it passed through the entrance?

Now let's go back to the beginning of history of Guam. It seems that when the island was first discovered the natives had sails of palm-leaves in their boats, which they handled with a great skill. Is this true?

And now to conclude: The islands, it seems, were named Ladrone or Thief because of the skill the natives had in the art of stealing. Later they were changed to Marianas. By whom? Where did the word get its derivation?"—WM. K. BURROUGHS, Fairmont, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—The history of the island of Guam, one of our own possessions, is one of interest. The largest of the Mariana Islands, it was ceded by Spain on December 10, 1898. It lies between latitudes 13° 14′ and 13° 39′ north, and longitudes 144° 37′ and 144° 58′ east. The island contains 225 square miles.

It is quite true that when Fernando Magellan discovered the Mariana Islands in 1521 the natives sailed "flying proas," canoes that carried huge triangular sails of palm matting. And it is equally true that Magellan's sailors, enraged at the thieving islanders, men and women who stole everything they could get their hands on, named the group "Islas de los Ladrones"—"Islands of Thieves." Magellan had given the name of "Islas de las Velas Latinas"—"Islands of the Lateen Sails."

In 1668 Queen Maria Ana of Spain established a mission in the group. Then the official name of the seventeen islands became "Las Islas Marianas." But "Islands of Thieves"—"Islas de los Ladrones"—is the name persistently clung to.

When I was at Guam in 1911 I did not hear of the typhoon you mention. However I can say that it is impossible for a sea or any number of seas to cover the island of Guam entirely. The southern half of the island rises from 1,200 to 1,300 feet.

If that vessel went out to sea, it must have been a total wreck. Perhaps it piled up on the reef, then was carried out in sections. Throughout the South Seas all manner of ships have piled up on reefs. And they will continue to do so, you know.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

GRANT, CARL L. Age twenty-four years, five feet eleven inches tall, weight about 140 lbs., brown hair, grayish-blue eyes. Left his home Sept. 9, 1921. Any information will be appreciated by his parents.—Address C. GRANT, 13 E. 17th St., Portland, Oregon.

MALONEY, ROGER Q. MILLS. Have something interesting if you see this.—Address J. D. DUNFIELD, Box 315, Petrolia, Ontario.

JACK PASSFIELD, CHARLIE FARNHAM, SAM PYLE. Also all ex-members of No. 2 Company 8th Batt. A. E. F. Please write.—Address V. W. HETTRICK, Box 484, Etowah, Tenn.

WILL be glad to hear from any of the old Marine Guard who served on the *North Carolina* from 1908 to 1911. Address R. F. AULT, Brown Hotel, Cedar Bluff, Ala.

MURRAYS, JAMES. Please write giving your address.—Address ALBERT McHAUGHTON, 74 Main St., Bar Harbor, Maine.

GILLAN, CATHOLINE. Last heard of in the Narrows, Oregon, about seventeen years ago. Married since, but name unknown. Please write your brother—EVERETT, 407 Hope St., Salida, Colorado.

BROWN, MARY (stage name "Mario") Dancer and piano player. Last heard of in Seattle, Wash., 1918. Mario if you see this please wire me C. O. D.—Care of ROSA STEWARD, Durango, Colorado, or write NANA GABLE, Box 944, Durango, Colo.

STREETER, RAY. Last heard of in Norfolk, W. Virginia, on board U. S. S. *Kansas* in 1913-14. Also sister HELEN STREETER, last seen at mother's grave in Norwalk, Ohio, but known to be placed in Orphans Home at Cleveland, Ohio. Please write.—COURTLAND and JAY STREETER, 215 E. Lake St., Minneapolis, Minn.

LESTER if you will write to mother at 510 Van Buren St., Amarillo, Texas, you will learn something to your advantage. Everything is all right.

WIKSTROM, RALPH RONALD LUDWIG. I am very sorry you went away. Please write or return, home.—Address MRS. R. WIKSTROM, 81 Stockholm St. Brooklyn, N. Y.

GRIFFITH, ARTHUR FREDERICK or WILLIAM Please write to sister.—Address LILY GRIFFITH, Box 55, Hamilton, Can.

GILDEWELL, R. R. Last heard from in Phœnix, Arizona. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. L. HUBER, P. O. Box 2217 St. B, San Francisco, Calif.

IDENTIFICATION Card No. 77, please write, to P. O. Box 222, Connellsville, Pa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SPENCER, RAYMOND. Age twenty-eight years, brown hair and eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address B, care of *Adventure*.

LANGSHAW, ROBERT HENRY. Disappeared Aug. 7th, 1919 from S. S. *Texas*, San Diego, Calif. Age twenty-five, five feet seven inches tall, weight 150 lbs., dark hair and eyes, fourth or fifth tooth missing in upper jaw, good shot, horseman and boxer. Lived for a while on a ranch in West Virginia. Member of Knights of Pythias and Patriotic Sons of America. Write at once. Mother is ill from worry.—Address MISS MAY FERN LANGSHAW, Vine Road, Vineland, New Jersey.

THE following have been inquired for in either the August 10th or August 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAIRD, THOMAS GEORGE; Beach, L. A.; Burke, Ray; Carter, Nick; Schaub Chas.; Delmas, Nick; Donahue, Thomas F.; De Vresse; Edens, Fred Clark; Kenny, Albert; Larsen, George Waldo; Luther, Robert; O'Neil, Arthur; McCallister, Wm. H.; McKay, Earl; Maule, Harry Almeroco; May, Mattie Marie; Mayle, Harold B.; Reynolds, "Diamond Joe"; Rogers, Bob; Shmoll, Edward; Steigerwald, Charles F.; Swauick, John Joseph; Wirt, G. Williams; Wortley, J. R.

MISCELLANEOUS—D. B. K.

MAIL received during the current month is held by Adventure for following persons, who may obtain it by sending present address and proof of identity.

MAIL—Crozier, W. A.; Lossum, Ralph; Sullivan, Walter.

HIDINGER, LEONARD L. Missing fireman. Formerly a member of Lodge 312, Dunsmuir, Cal. Is about twenty-three years of age; height five ft. nine ins.; weight about 150 lbs., dark hair and brown eyes. Left Dunsmuir where he was firing on the Shasta Dist. of the S. P. about May 15, 1921, to visit his brothers at Hammond, Ind. Last heard of at Provo, Utah. July 15, 1921. Any information will be appreciated by his parents.—Address H. H. HIDINGER, 853 Houck St., Roseberg, Ore., or RECORDING SEC'Y, Lodge 312, Box 552, Dunsmuir, Cal.

A COMPLETE list of unclaimed mail will be published in December 30th and June 30th issues of Adventure.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

SEPTEMBER 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **complete novelette** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

RAWHIDED A desert abduction.	*H. S. Cooper*
SEVEN RUGS AND SEVEN MEN Lascar intrigue.	*George McPherson Hunter*
OLD MISERY A Four-Part Story Part II A bear-tamer of early California.	*Hugh Pendexter*
THE KING DIES A game of chess for high stakes.	*Harold Lamb*
CIRCUMSTANCES A trial in the mountains.	*Howard B. Beynon*
OYSTHERS! Three pearls—one white, two black.	*Gordon Young*
THE REGENERATION OF PESOKIE Indian Winter.	*Frank Robertson*
SNOOTFULS, GULLET AND HAWKEYE The naval signal chief was a bully.	*Charles Victor Fischer*

What could you do with $2000?

$5000 in Cash Prizes

Somebody's Letter about Leather will win that much in hard cash. Why don't you write that Letter?

The best Letter about Leather will earn $2000.00.
The next best letter, $500.00.
Third best letter, $200.00.
Five prizes of $100.00.
Ten prizes of $50.00.
Twenty prizes of $25.00.
Eighty consolation prizes of $10.00.
One hundred and eighteen cash prizes, amounting to $5000.00, for Letters about Leather.

WHAT a Letter about Leather you can write, out of your own experience! Those shoes with soles that it seemed would never wear out . . . there is a practical reason back of that wear.

Leather is so tough because the living hide is made of millions on millions of springy fibres, bundled tight together, and tunneled with tiny pores. Tanning makes these fibres even tougher than nature made them.

A leather sole "gives" just enough to make walking easy. Through the pores, the foot's heat escapes. Your skin breathes, your feet stay cool.

Some mother will be sure to seize on such traits of leather to win a prize with a letter on how well it suits her children's foot-needs.

Any business girl, whose limited means must keep her trimly shod, soon learns how only good leather soles keep shoes style-fresh.

Many another merit of leather will furnish themes for cash-winning letters. Leather belts that have driven machinery year after year; old sole-leather trunks, banged around the travel-routes of the world for years.

Leather stands the weather! How many know that—and will write letters to prove it! What is to keep you from winning the $2000 first prize?

Write your Letter about Leather—to-day!

Rules of the Contest

1—Letters must be written in the English language, and on only one side of the paper.
2—The competitor's name and address must be written at the top of the first page of the letter.
3—The letter must be mailed in a sealed, stamped envelope. No post cards will be considered.
4—There shall be no limits to the length a letter may be; and any competitor may send in as many letters as desired.
5—This Contest shall be freely open to anyone, anywhere.
6—The first prize will be awarded to the contestant whose letter on the subject "Nothing Takes the Place of Leather," is the best in the opinion of the judges.
7—The contest opens officially June 30th, 1923, and closes October 31st, 1923.
8—In case of a tie both or all tying contestants will receive the full amount of the prize tied for.

JUDGES

MARTHA E. DODSON, *Associate Editor, The Ladies' Home Journal*
PRESIDENT FREDERICK C. HICKS *of the University of Cincinnati*
PRESIDENT FRASER M. MOFFATT *of the Tanners' Council*

Address your letter to Contest Judges

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Tanning is one of the nation's great industries which touches the life of every citizen. It is unprotected by tariff of any kind. The return upon capital invested in the business of tanning sole and belting leather is less than that of almost any other major industry. In order to place the facts about the industry before the public and awaken a consciousness of the value of good leather, this advertising campaign is undertaken by a group of the principal sole and belting leather tanners.

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A New Craig Kennedy
Mystery Story by
Arthur B. Reeve

◆

BLOOD is thicker than water—but can you tell by blood tests who is the father of a child? Hamlin Hartley, the dissolute millionaire, accuses his wife and claims that he is not the father of her child. The case is taken to Craig Kennedy, the great criminologist, who is also trying to solve the strange murder of Louise Lavender, the beauty-culturist whose name had been linked with Hartley's.

Kennedy tries some interesting blood experiments and then he summons all the people in the case to his laboratory. Read this fascinating mystery story by the well-known writer, Arthur B. Reeve. It appears in SEPTEMBER

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